

# JUSOOR

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THE ARAB AMERICAN JOURNAL OF CULTURAL EXCHANGE, PRESENT AND FUTURE

7/8

## CULTURE, CREATIVITY AND EXILE

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1996

**CULTURE,  
CREATIVITY  
AND EXILE**



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1996

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## JUSOOR

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# CULTURE, CREATIVITY AND EXILE

Edited by  
MUNIR AKASH / AMIRA EL-ZEIN

Visiting Editors  
ISSA J. BOULLATA  
HUSAIN HADDAWY



A Jusoor Book  
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1996

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- p. 1: Olmec, Middle formative Period, 4-Group of Standing figures and Celts  
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## Acknowledgments

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*There are many brilliant ordinary and extraordinary people I wish to thank for their talented touch of wordsmith :Sharif Elmusa, Sinan Antoon, Abed Awad, Clarissa Burt, Muna Asali van Engen and of course the golden touch of the foremost poetic voice of Sufism in America, Daniel Moore.*

*I have to thank my dear friends Issa J. Boullata and Husain Haddawy for honoring me and Jusoor by accepting my modest invitation to become visiting editors of this special issue. I thank them both from the bottom of my heart for giving me some of the best advice I ever had. Issa Boullata fulfilled a very dear wish to our common friend late Jabra by translating his work "Jerusalem, time embodied" in an amazing translation. Jabra wanted me to do that a long time ago and no one but the faithful Issa Boullata made this wish come true.*

*I hope all those extraordinary people understand that their spirit lives within this issue of Jusoor in the most positive way.*

*Finally I have to admit that all the great work in this issue exists thanks to these wonderful people who transform our exile into creative paradise, and that every mistake in it is mine.*

**Munir Akash**

## REEDS CUT FROM THEIR REEDBED

And the time is come, O Poet, to declare your name, your  
birth, and your race..."

—Saint-John Perse - *Exile*

Those of us who may be in exile in our own lands—but only psychologically or spiritually—may not truly appreciate what life is like for people who are forced, for one reason or another, to live many thousands of miles away from home. We may think of them simply as nostalgic eccentrics on the run who come to America, dry their wash in the sun, and have pronunciation troubles with the prevailing language. After a while, they set up little restaurants for themselves in downtown areas or out-of-the-way neighborhoods, hang paintings of well-known landmarks from their homeland on the walls, and meet on Saturdays and Sundays from their engineering and computer jobs (or perhaps professions as doctors or scholars, blue collar workers, etc.) to keep a solidarity with fellow exiles and the land they've all been exiled from... drinking strong coffee in little white cups and dipping their pita bread in olive oil and *zattar*.

Renowned Arab author and painter, Jabra I. Jabra, in his article in this special *Exile* issue of *Jusoor*, says, "The sense of loss in an exile is unlike any other sense of loss." A living part

of one's core is torn out, the deepest marrow of one's being is displaced when a person is forced into exile—all associations with place cut off—and made to wander the earth with interior landscapes forming only an emotional connection with the uprooted territory of one's essential being. While exile may create great art and thought (this century owes an incalculable debt to exiles for its major ideas and works: Einstein, Freud, Joyce, Picasso, Schoenberg, Rilke, Jebran, Darwish), more often it engenders an abiding sense of grief. Continual displacement is wearing, galvanizing some into resistant action, numbing others into passive despair. And if a person is displaced after seeing family, village, loved ones wiped out, then the despair must engender further offshoots of despair, tributaries of despair, anxieties and inner tortures nearly unbearable in their impact.

I said "nearly," with no real experiential thermometer to measure with, only God's Word that He will not burden us with more than we can bear. But the limit of that burden may be measured only by Divine Knowledge, as well as the reward when it really does seem we are asked to bear too much. Hiroshima victims witnessed the dematerialization of their thriving city, and the ones who didn't perish with it are forevermore in exile from its living energy. Palestinians have seen much the same thing in the wholesale "evaporation" of hundreds, *hundreds*, of home villages, bulldozed and blown up, now mere rubble and wasteland, leaving them with nowhere left to return *to*. Only through the exiles' eyes shines the country they have come from—its flora and fauna, its people with the sanity and insanity peculiar to their race, and above all, its history, ancient days made poignant in the immediacy of their exile. One hears the human family of sighs and anguish, of hopes dashed and basic fears of safety realized in the tumultuous dramas that have uprooted them.

In the works of Jabra represented in this issue we have a vivid account of a minutely remembered Jerusalem, the life of a

writer in exile, and a chapter from one of his major novels, as well as a number of perspectives on his life. He was, as fellow exile (another influential expatriate) Edward Said said in his obituary in 1995, one of the most elegant exiles, "a really educated man... Jabra made one proud to be part of the Arab heritage, but he did this quietly, soberly, seriously..."; Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Amira El-Zein discuss Sufism, creativity and exile; Sadik J. Al-Azm heats up a controversy in his debate about Islam, authenticity and exile; Thomas Lamont discusses one of Arab literature's unknown contributions to the world canon, a *Robinson Crusoe* story by Ibn Tufayl of *Hayy Ibn Yaqzan*, exiled at birth on a desert island, arriving at knowledge of God through deduction, with the first portion of the original story that I have recreated as poetry; Michèle Sarde mirrors in French the spirit of exile in Yourcenar's life and works; Diana Haddawy discusses modern author Etel Adnan's book *Sitt Marie Rose*, novel on the Lebanese civil war; exile in Japan by Laura Mitchell; a large selection of poetry by poets in exile, with new translations of works by the great Palestinian poet, Mahmoud Darwish; and an article in Arabic by *Jusoor* editor and founder, Munir Akash, about the sacred executioner, a reading of the founding myths of America, this great land of exiles who made the few survivors of its original people exiles in their own land.

But except for the often violent cause of exile, what do we know about why we are sent here or there, what do we know what tomorrow may bring or why yesterday has been cut off from us? Like Rumi's famous flute, we are a reed cut off from our reedbed, making a breathy music which is really a mournful lament to return to our original Paradise.

-- Daniel Moore for  
*Jusoor*







*And They Moved without him* by Blackbear Bosin. The Philbrook Museum of Art, Tulsa, Oklahoma

# MAHMOUD DARWISH

## THREE POEMS

Translated by  
MUNA ASALI VAN ENGEN  
CLARISSA BURT  
NOEL ABDULAHAD

والأنبياء جميعهم أهلي، ولكن السماء بعيدة عن أرضها، وأنا بعيد عن كلامي والبحر ينزل تحت سطح البحر كي تطفو عظامي شجراً. غيابي كله شجر. وبابي ظلّه قمر. وكعبانية أمي. وهذا البحر جسر ثابت لعبور أيام القيامة. يا أبي، كم مرة سأمرت فوق فراش امرأة الأساطير التي تختارها «أنت» لي، فتشّب نار في الغمام كم مرة سأمرت في نضاع أحواض القديّة كلما فركته ريح شمالك العالي رسائل من يمام ؟ هذا غيابي سيّد يملو شرائعه على أخفاد لوط، ولا يرى لسدوم مغفرة سواي هذا غيابي سيّد يملو شرائعه ويسخر من رؤاي ما قيمة المرأة للمرأة؟ لي وجه عليك، وأنت لا تصحو من التاريخ، لا تمحو بخار البحر عنك والبحر، هذا البحر، أصغر من خرافته وأصغر من يدك هو برزخ البلور، أوله كآخره، ولا معنى هنا لدخولك العيشي في إسطورة تركت جيوشاً للركام ليمر جيش آخر يروي روايته ويحفر لاسمه جيلاً، ويأتي ثالث ويخط سيرة زوجة خانت، ويحو رايح أسماً من سبقوا. هناك لكل جيش شاعر ومؤرخ، ورابة للراقصات الساخرات من البداية والختام... وسدى أفتش عن غيابي، فهو أبسط من حمير الأنبياء تمر فوق السفح حاملة سماء للأثام... والبحر، هذا البحر، في متناول الأيدي، سامشي فوقه

## ON A CANAANITE STONE AT THE DEAD SEA

*Translated by Muna Asali van Engen*

The sea opens no door before me...  
I say my poem  
is a rock flying at my father  
like a partridge. Father,  
have you heard what has happened to me?  
The sea closes no door before me.  
No mirror I can shatter makes a path  
of slivers before me  
or a path of foam. Does anyone  
weep for anyone, that I  
may carry his flute and reveal  
the secrets of my own wreckage?  
I am of the shepherds of salt  
in al-Aghwar. A bird plucks  
at my language, building a nest in my tents  
from the scattered azure.  
Is there still a country  
that flowed out of me  
so I can look at it as I wish,  
so it can look at me  
at the west coast of myself on the stone of eternity?  
This absence of yours is all trees  
looking at you from yourself

and from this smoke of mine.  
Jericho sleeps under her ancient palm tree.  
I find no one to rock her cradle.  
Their caravans grow quiet, so sleep.  
I looked for a root for my name  
but I am split apart  
by a magic wand. Do my dreams reveal  
my victims or my visions?  
All the prophets are my family,  
Yet heaven is still far from its land  
and I am far from my words.  
No wind lifts me above the past here.  
No wind tears a wave from the salt of this sea.  
There are no white flags for the dead to wave  
to surrender, no voices for the living  
to exchange declarations of peace...  
The sea carries my silver shadow at dawn  
and shepherds me to my first words,  
to the breast of the first woman.  
It lives dead in the pagan's dance  
around his space and dies alive  
by the pairing of poem and sword.  
At the crossroads of Egypt, Asia  
and the North, stranger, halt your horse  
under our palm trees. On Syrian roads,  
foreigners exchange war helmets  
bristling with basil  
sown from doves that alight  
from the houses; and the sea died  
of monotony in the undying testaments.  
I am myself if only you yourself  
were there as yourself. I am the stranger  
to the desert palm tree from the time I was born  
into this crowded mass. And I am myself.  
A war rages against me. A war rages

within me... Stranger, hang your weapons  
above our palm tree so I may plant  
my wheat in the sacred soil of Canaan...  
Take wine from my jars. Take a page  
from my gods' book. Take a portion  
of my meal and gazelle from the traps  
of our shepherds' songs.  
Take the Canaanite woman's prayers  
at the feast of her grapes. Take our customs  
of irrigation. Take our architecture.  
Lay a single brick and build up  
a tower for doves, to be one of us,  
if that's what you desire. Be a neighbor  
to our wheat. Take the stars  
of our alphabet from us, stranger.  
Write heaven's message with me  
to mankind's fear of nature and men.  
Leave Jericho under her palm tree  
but do not steal my dream, the milk  
of my woman's breast, the food  
of ants in cracks of marble!  
Have you come... then murdered... then inherited  
in order to increase the salt of this sea?  
I am myself growing greener  
with the passing of years on the oak's trunk.  
This is me and I am myself. This is my  
place in my place, and now I see you in the past  
the way you came, yet you don't see me.  
I illuminate for my present  
its tomorrow. Time sometimes separates me  
from my place, and my place separates me from my time.  
All the prophets are my family.  
Yet heaven is still far from its land  
and I am still far from my words.  
And the sea descends below sea level

so my bones float over water like trees.  
My absence is all trees. The shadow  
of my door is a moon.  
My mother is a Canaanite and this sea  
is a constant bridge to the Day of Judgment.  
Father, how many times must I die  
on the bed of the legendary woman  
Anat chose for me, so a fire  
will ignite in the clouds? How many  
times must I die in my old mint garden  
every time your high northern wind  
envelops the mint and scatters letters like doves?  
This is my absence, a master  
who reads his laws upon Lot's descendants  
and sees no pardon for Sodom  
but myself. This is my absence,  
a master who reads his laws  
and mocks my visions. Of what use  
is the mirror to the mirror?  
A bond of familiarity lies  
between us, but you will not arise  
from history, nor erase the sea steam  
from you. And the sea, this sea,  
smaller than its myth, smaller than  
your hands, is a crystalline isthmus.  
Its beginning is like its end.  
There is no sense here for your absurd entry  
in a legend that grinds armies into ruin  
just so another army may march through,  
writing its own story, carving its  
own name into a mountain. A third will come  
to chronicle the story of an unfaithful wife  
and a fourth comes to erase the names  
of our forebears. Each army has a poet  
and a historian, each a violin for the dancers,

cynical from first to last. Hopelessly, I seek  
my absence, more innocent than the donkeys  
of the prophets that tread the foothills  
carrying heaven to mankind...  
And the sea, this sea, lies  
within my grasp. I will walk  
across it, will mint its silver, will grind  
its salt in my hands. This sea is not occupied  
by anyone. Cyrus, Pharaoh, Caesar, Negus  
and the others came to write their names, with my hand,  
on its tablets. So I write: The land is in my name  
and the name of the land is the gods that share  
my place on the seat of stone. I have  
not gone, have not returned with slippery time.  
And I am myself despite my defeat.  
I have seen the coming days gilding my first trees.  
I saw my mother's spring. Father, I have seen  
her needle stitching two birds, one for her shawl  
and one for the shawl of my sister, and a butterfly  
unscaled by a butterfly for our sake. I have  
seen a body for my name. I am the male dove  
moaning in the female dove. I have seen  
our house furnished in greenery and I saw  
an entry door and an exit door  
and a door that was both.  
Has Noah passed from that place to that place  
to say about the world, " It has  
two different doors," but the horse flies with me  
and the horse flies with me higher still and I fall  
like a wave that erodes the foothills.  
Father, I am myself despite my defeat.  
I saw my days in front of me and I have seen  
among my documents a moon  
overlooking the palm trees.  
And I saw an abyss. I saw war after war.



That tribe became extinct and that tribe  
told the present Hulagu, "We're yours."  
I say, "We're not a slave nation,  
and I send my respects to Ibn Khaldun."  
I am myself despite being smashed on the metallic air.  
I have been handed over by the new Crusader war  
to the god of vengeance and the Mongol  
lurking behind the Imam's mask.  
And to the salt women in a legend  
etched into my bones. I am myself,  
if only you were my father, but I am  
a stranger to the palm trees of the desert  
from the time I was born into this crowded mass.  
And I am myself. The sea opens  
no door before me. I say my poem  
is a rock flying at my father  
like a partridge. Father,  
have you heard what has happened to me?  
The sea closes no door before me.  
No mirror I can shatter makes a path  
of its slivers before me...  
And all the prophets are my family,  
but heaven is still far from its land  
and I am far from my words.

## ELEVEN PLANETS OVER ANDALUSIA

*Translated by Clarissa Burt*

### I. LAST EVENING ON THIS EARTH

The last evening on this Earth  
we sever our days from our trellises,  
count the ribs we'll bear away with us  
and the ribs we'll leave behind.  
Here they are, on the last evening.  
We bid farewell to nothing,  
we find no time to finish,  
everything stays as it is,  
for place alters dreams as it alters visitors.  
Suddenly we can't go back to making fun  
for the place prepares to host fine dust,  
here, on the last evening.  
We contemplate mountains ringing cloud,  
invasion / counter-invasion,  
an ancient age handing over our door keys  
to the hands of this new age.  
Enter our homes, then, invaders,  
Drink the wine of our mellow ballads!  
We are night at midnight, no  
dawn carried by a knight coming  
from the last prayer-call's side.

Our tea is hot and green — drink !  
Our pistachios are fresh — Eat!  
The beds are green with cedarwood —  
give in to sleepiness!  
After this long siege, sleep on our dreams' down —  
sheets are fresh, scents at the door, and the mirrors are many.  
Enter so we may exit, then, completely.  
Soon we'll seek what our history was  
surrounding your history in distant lands.  
At last we ask ourselves, was Andalusia  
    here or there? on Earth...  
    or only in Odes?

## **II. HOW DO I WRITE ABOVE THE CLOUDS?**

How do I write my kinfolk's will above the clouds?  
My kin leave Time behind,  
as they leave their overcoats at home...my kin  
erect a citadel, tear it down, to raise a tent above ...  
a tent to longing for the first glimpse of palmtrees.  
Kinfolk betray my kinfolk  
in wars defending salt. But Granada is of gold,  
of silken words embroidered with almonds,  
of the silver glints of tears on lutestrings;  
Granada is for the great ascension unto her very Self.  
She may be as she wishes: longing  
for anything past or anything passing:  
a swallow's wing touching a woman's breast in bed —  
she screams: Granada is my body!  
Someone losing his gazelle in the badlands —  
he screams: Granada is my country. I'm from there!  
Sing, so goldfinches build of my ribs  
a stair to the nearest heaven,  
Sing the chivalry of those ascending  
to their death, moon by moon,  
in the loved one's alley.  
Sing the birds of the garden  
stone by stone! How much I love you,  
who cut me down sinew by sinew  
on the road to her hot night. Sing:  
"There's no morning for coffee's aroma  
after you." Sing my migration  
from the coo of mourning doves on your knee  
and from my spirit's nest  
in the letters of your liquid name:  
"Granada" belongs to song, so,  
Sing!

### III. HEAVEN BEYOND HEAVEN FOR ME

There's a heaven beyond Heaven for me, so I'll return,  
yet I polish this place's metal,  
live an hour seeing the Unseen.  
I know time will not be my ally twice.  
I know I'll emerge from my banner a bird  
alighting not on garden trees.  
I'll emerge from my whole skin. From my language  
some Love words will come down in the poetry of Lorca  
who'll dwell in my bedroom, see  
what I've seen of the bedouin moon.  
I'll emerge from almond trees, cottonfluff on seafoam.  
A stranger passed by bearing  
seven hundred years of horsepower.  
A stranger passed by here so that a stranger may pass by there.  
I'll emerge yet awhile from my time's wrinkles,  
to Sham and to Andalusia a stranger.  
This earth is not my heaven, yet  
this evening is my evening.  
The keys belong to me, the minarets and lamps,  
even I belong to me.  
I am Adam of two Edens  
twice lost to me;  
Expel me easy —  
Kill me easy  
under my olive tree  
with Lorca.

#### **IV. I'M ONE OF THE KINGS OF THE END**

I'm one of the kings of the end...in the last winter  
I leap off my mare; I am Arab man's last gasp.  
I don't look down upon myrtle over rooftops,  
I don't look I around me lest someone see me here  
who knows me, who knew me when I polished word marble  
my woman crosses barefoot over dappled light.  
I don't look out at night lest I see  
a moon that kindled all Granada's secrets,  
body by body. I don't look at shadow lest I see  
one bearing my name running after me.  
Take your name from me, give me the silver of poplars!  
I don't turn behind me lest I be  
reminded I passed over the earth.  
There is no earth on this earth,  
since time broke around me sliver by sliver  
I was no lover believing that water is a mirror.  
I said to my old friends: No love puts in a good word for me  
since I accepted The Settlement Accord . No longer  
is there a present, so I pass tomorrow near yesterday.  
Castille will raise her crown above Allah's minaret.  
I hear the tinkling of keys  
in our golden history's doorway.  
I bid farewell to our history.  
Who will close the last door to heaven?  
I, Arab man's last gasp.

## V. ONE DAY I'LL SIT ON THE SIDEWALK

One day I'll sit on the sidewalk... a stranger's sidewalk —  
I'm no Narcissus, yet I defend my image in mirrors...  
Weren't you here once before, stranger?  
Five hundred years past and gone; the break  
isn't over completely between us here!  
Letters never stopped between us, wars  
didn't change the gardens of Granada. One day  
I'll pass by her moons, brush my desire with lemon:  
Embrace me that I may be born again  
of scents, of sun, and the river on your shoulders,  
of two feet scratching the evening  
so that it weep milk tears for the evening of the Ode!  
I was no passerby in the singer's words...  
I was the singers' words:  
the Peace of Athens and Persia,  
east embracing west,  
on a journey to the single essence.  
Embrace me that I may be born again  
of Damascene swords in shops!  
Nothing remains of me but my old armor,  
my horse's gold-worked saddle,  
Nothing but a manuscript of Averroës,  
*The Dove's Necklace*, translated works.  
I would sit on the sidewalk of the Square of black-eyed susans  
counting pigeons, one, two, thirty... girls  
who snatch bush shadows on marble  
and leave me leaves of a lifetime, yellow.  
Autumn passed me over, I didn't notice  
the whole autumn passing,  
as our history passed over the sidewalk.  
I didn't notice.



## **VI. REALITY IS TWO-FACED/SNOW IS BLACK**

Reality is two-faced. Snow falls black over our city.  
We can despair no more than we've despaired,  
The end walks to the wall, steadfast in its footsteps,  
above this tile wet with tears, steadfast in its footsteps.  
Who will take down our flags: we or they? And who  
will read The Settlement Accord aloud to us, O King of Dying?  
Everything is prepared for us from of old;  
who will yank out our names  
from our identity? You or they?  
Who will plant in us the Wilderness' Sermon?:  
"We could not break the siege  
so we surrender the keys of our paradise  
to the Minister of Peace, and survive."  
Reality is two-faced — the sacred slogan was a sword  
for us and against us. What did you do  
with our citadel before this light of day?  
You didn't fight because you fear martyrdom;  
Your throne is your bier —  
Bear the bier to preserve your throne, O King of Waiting.  
This peace will leave us handfuls of dust.  
Who will bury our days after us: You ... or they? Who  
will raise their banners above our walls:  
you ... or a desperate knight?  
Who hangs their bells upon our journey  
you ... or a wretched guard?  
Everything is prepared for us —  
Why prolong the speech, O King of Dying?

## **VII. WHO AM I AFTER THE STRANGER'S NIGHT?**

Who am I after the stranger's night? I rise from my dream  
fearing day's obscurity on the marble of home,  
sun's darkness on the rose, my fountain's water,  
fearing milk on the lip of figs, fearing my language,  
fearing the breeze which combs the willow, fearing, *fearing*  
the clarity of time condensed, and a present  
no longer present, fearing my passage  
over a world no longer mine.  
Despair, be a mercy; O Death be a boon  
to the stranger who sees the Unseen clearer  
than a reality no longer real. I will fall from a star  
in the heavens to a tent on the road to...where?  
Where is the road to anything? I see the Unseen clearer  
than a street no longer mine. Who am I after the stranger's night?  
I would walk to the very Self in Others, but here am I  
losing Self as well as Others.  
My horse on the Atlantic coast disappeared;  
my horse on the Mediterranean sinks the crusader's spear in me.  
Who am I after the stranger's night? I cannot return  
to my siblings near the palm tree of my old house,  
I cannot descend to the bottom of my abyss;  
Love has no heart, no  
loving heart to dwell in  
after the stranger's night.

### **VIII. BE STRING, WATER, TO MY GUITAR**

Be string, water, to my guitar;  
conquerors come, conquerors go...  
It's hard to remember my face in mirrors.  
Be my memory so I can see what I have lost...  
Who am I after this collective exodus?  
I have a boulder bearing my name  
on a rise looking over what is done and gone;  
seven hundred years accompany me beyond the city wall.  
Vainly time turns around to save my past from a moment  
giving birth now to the history  
of my exile in others and in me.  
Be string, water, to my guitar,  
Conquerors come, Conquerors go  
southwards as nations, rotting  
in the compost of transformation.  
I know who I was yesterday,  
so what am I to be tomorrow  
under Columbus' Atlantic banners? Be string,  
to my guitar, water, be string;  
There is no Misr in Misr, no  
Fez in Fez, and Syria is far off;  
no hawk is on the banner of my kin,  
No river runs east of the palm tree besieged  
by the Mongolian's swift horses.  
In which Andalusia did he end?  
Here in this place?  
Or there? I will know that I have perished, leaving here  
the best of what is in me: my past.  
Nothing remains to me but my guitar.  
Be string, water, to my guitar.  
conquerors come, conquerors go.

## **IX. IN THE GREAT MIGRATION I LOVE YOU MORE**

In the Great Migration I love you more;  
in a while you'll lock the city.  
No heart have I in your hands, nor any path  
to carry me — In the Great Migration I'll love you more.  
The pomegranate of our balcony has no milk after your breast.  
Palm trees have grown light,  
the weight of hills has grown light,  
our streets grew light in the late afternoon,  
earth grew light since it bid its earth farewell.  
Words grew light, tales grew light on the stair of night.  
Yet my heart is heavy.  
Leave it here howling around your house,  
bemoaning the beautiful time that I have no homeland but...  
In Migration I love you more —  
I empty the spirit of last words: I love you more  
in Migration. Butterflies lead our spirits. In Migration  
we remember the shirtbutton we lost, we forget  
the crown of our days, we remember  
the scent of apricot sweat, we forget  
the dance of horses on our wedding nights.  
In Migration we are equal with birds,  
we have mercy on our days, we suffice with little.  
From you, I suffice with the golden dagger  
dancing in the slain one's heart.  
Slay me slowly, so I may say I love you more  
than I said before the Great Migration.  
I love you. Nothing pains me —  
neither breeze, nor water, nor the basil plant in your morning,  
nor a lily in your evening pains me,  
after this Migration.

## **X. ALL I WANT OF LOVE IS A BEGINNING**

All I want of love is a beginning; pigeons mend  
the dress of day above my Granada's courtyards,  
in jars of wine for the feastdays that come after us.  
In songs are openings enough for pomegranates to burst forth.

I leave jasmine in the flowerpot, I leave my small heart  
in my mother's cupboard, I leave dreams in water, laughing,  
I leave the dawn in fig honey, I leave my today, my yesterday  
in the corridor to the Orange Courtyard where pigeons fly.

Am I the one who went down to your feet, so words would rise  
as a moon in the milk of your nights, bathed in white?... Beat the air!  
so I may see Reedflute Street, bathed in blue...Beat the evening!  
so I may see how this marble grew ill between me and you.

The windows are empty of your shawl's gardens. Another time  
I would know all about you, pluck a gardenia  
from your ten fingers. Another time I had pearls around  
your towering neck, a name ring from which dark rays forth.

All I want of love is a beginning; pigeons flew  
above the ceiling of the last heaven; pigeons flew and flew!  
There will be lots of wine, after us, in jars;  
A little earth suffices us for meeting, and peace descends.

## **XI. VIOLINS**

Violins weep with gypsies going to Andalusia,  
Violins weep over Arabs leaving Andalusia.

Violins weep over time lost, no turning back,  
Violins weep over a homeland lost, perhaps to return.

Violins burn the forests of that deep, deep darkness,  
Violins bleed butcher knives, smell my jugular blood.

Violins weep with gypsies going to Andalusia,  
Violins weep over Arabs leaving Andalusia.

Violins are horses on a gut-string of mirage, of keening water,  
Violins are a field of beastly lilac, far flung, drawing near.

Violins are beasts tortured by a woman's nail which touched  
    then withdrew,  
Violins are an army peopling a cemetery of marble and melody.

Violins are hearts' chaos crazed by wind in the dancer's foot,  
Violins are birdflocks fleeing a defective flag.

Violins are the complaint of curled silk in the lover's night,  
Violins are the sound of wine harking back to an earlier desire.

Violins follow me, here, there, to wreak vengeance on me,  
Violins seek me to kill me, wherever they find me.

Violins weep over Arabs leaving Andalusia,  
Violins weep with gypsies going to Andalusia.

## ALL I WANT TO SEE

*Translated by Noel Abdulahad*

## 1

I see all I want to see of the field:  
Tresses of wheat combed by the wind.  
I close my eyes:  
This mirage only leads to a melody—  
This silence only leads to a blue twilight.

## 2

I see all I want to see of the sea:  
Gulls flying through sunset.  
I close my eyes:  
This loss leads to Andalusia—  
This sail is pigeons' prayers  
pouring down on me.

## 3

I see all I want to see of the night:  
A long trip's end  
hanging around a city gate.  
I will leave my diaries behind



in sidewalk cafes—  
I will give this nowhere  
a seat on one of the ships.

4

I see all I want to see of the soul:  
Face of stone etched by lightning.  
You're so green, my land!  
So green, O my soul's land!  
Wasn't I that child playing  
    near the lip of the well,  
still playing?  
This space is my courtyard.  
These stones are my winds.

5

I see all I want to see of peace:  
A deer, a pasture and a stream.  
I close my eyes:  
The deer is sleeping in my arms—  
His hunter is asleep in a faraway place  
near his children.

6

I see all I want to see of war:  
A spring of water  
Our forefathers squeezed  
from a green stone.  
Our fathers inherited the water  
but they do not give it to us.  
I close my eyes:  
What is left of the land

I made with my own hands.

7

I see all I want to see of prison:  
Days of a flower  
That guided two strangers from here  
To a garden seat.  
I close my eyes:  
You are so vast, O land,  
so wondrous seen through the needle's eye!

8

I see all I want to see of lightning:  
Profusion of vegetation rent by weeds.  
Hail to the almond's song flowing white  
over village smoke, as flocks of pigeons  
sharing our children's food.

9

I see all I want to see of love:  
Horses inspiring the plains to dance  
and fifty guitars sighing,  
swarms of bees sucking blackberries.  
I close my eyes  
to see our shadows  
behind this restless place.

10

I see all I want to see of death:  
In love, my chest splits open  
and the white horse of Eros bolts out of it,

gallops above infinite cloud,  
races with the eternal blue.  
Don't stop me from dying!  
Don't return me to an earthly star.

**11**

I see all I want to see of blood:  
The murdered addressing his murderer  
the moment a bullet lights up his heart:  
From now on you can remember only me.  
I murdered you by mistake  
so you will remember only me.  
You can't tolerate Spring roses.

**12**

I see all I want to see of the theatre of the absurd:  
The beasts, the judges, the emperor's hat,  
the masks of the Age, the color of the ancient sky,  
the palace dancer, the unruly armies,  
I want to forget them all!  
I just want to remember  
the dead piled high behind the curtain.

**13**

I see all I want to see of poetry:  
We used to wear garlands of flowers  
and follow the funeral procession of  
our martyred poets, then come back  
safe and sound to their poems.  
But in this tabloid age of cinemas and  
buzzing noises  
we jeer as we bury their poems in heaps of dust

then glimpse them waiting in doorways for us  
when we return home.

14

I see all I want to see of the dawn at dawn:  
Many search in other people's bread  
for their daily bread.  
It's bread, bread  
that wakes us from our naps and fluffy dreams!  
Does life's dawn and war's dawn  
peep out at us from a tiny kernel of wheat?

15

I see all I want to see of people:  
Their nostalgic desire for anything and everything,  
their slow pace when going to work,  
their fast pace when coming home,  
their incessant need to be told:  
*Good morning!*



## JABRA: THE RESTLESS PALESTINIAN EXILE

When Jabra left Palestine in 1948, he was a young man twenty-eight years old, full of vigor, vision, and hope. It was not his choice to leave his native land, for he had recently returned to it from England, where he had spent four years (1939-1943) earning a bachelor's degree in English literature at Cambridge University and had established himself as a professor at the Rashidiyya College in Jerusalem and as one of the leading young intellectuals of his country. But he was forced into exile by the bad political and military circumstances of Palestine which made him lose his job; he found himself uprooted after also losing his home in the Jerusalem Arab neighborhood of Qatamon to Jewish terrorists and after losing most of his country to an alien entity called Israel imposed on it by the force of arms and a United Nations partition plan he and his people rejected because of its injustice. The fabric of Palestinian society was consequently torn when more than one million defenseless civilians, like him, were as a result displaced from their homes, dislocated from their lands and businesses, dispersed in all directions by terror and the threat of death by enemy bombs and bullets, and left to roam aimlessly after having suffered many casualties including the death of relatives and friends and after having seen barbarities of the worst kind.

Chased out of Jerusalem, Jabra moved with his mother and brothers to live in a makeshift home in Bethlehem, his birthplace, which had not been occupied by Jewish forces during the ugly hostilities in Palestine between Jews and Arabs that followed the United Nations partition plan of November 29, 1947 and the termination of the British Mandate on May 15, 1948. He then left his homeland in the summer of 1948 to seek employment elsewhere, thinking that he would return to his country before long. But his expatriation turned out to be very long, and although he visited Bethlehem and the Arab-controlled sector of Jerusalem a few times to see family and friends in what came to be called the 'West Bank' in truncated Palestine which was under Jordanian rule until June 5, 1967, he was destined not to return to live in his homeland and finally to die as an exile in Baghdad on December 12, 1994, when he was in his seventy-fifth year.

If one discounts Jabra's four years of study in England, one realizes that his residence in Palestine may not have exceeded twenty-four years. These were the formative years of his boyhood, adolescence, and early manhood. Yet it is no exaggeration to say that these were the most influential years of his life to which he kept continually returning in his writings. For him, Palestine was not merely the idyllic scene of childhood and youth with their charming and ever-memorable experiences of early life, as any homeland would be for any human being normally growing into adulthood in his own peaceful country. To be sure, he missed Palestine but not merely because of early memories of it, however strong this factor was for him. He missed it as a human being in exile would, which is to say, in a manner different from that of someone missing his early life memories as an adult still living normally in his own native land. Yet Jabra missed Palestine for deeper reasons still: he missed it with all the Palestinians because it was taken away from them unjustly, by force, against their will, for no fault of theirs, and as though their modern-day

existence and their centuried history did not matter because all that mattered to the Great Powers of the world and those in their camp was to create a "national home" or a state for the Jews. Jabra's feeling for Palestine, therefore, was not one of mere nostalgia. It was a feeling of deep hurt that lived with him always and was bound not to disappear until a hoped-for future day when his very soul would become whole again with the restoration of Palestine and his return to it. This feeling is shared by all Palestinians and perpetuated in the Palestinian new generations born in exile, like Jabra's own children and grandchildren, who continue to hope for a reconstitution of their national society in their own homeland. In the meantime, Palestinians have regenerated themselves as a cohesive nation that will not rest until the cultural, social, political, and economic institutions and structures they have rebuilt in exile to preserve their identity are domiciled with them on the land of their ancestors in Palestine to endure for generations to come and be developed in peace.

Of the many writings of Jabra treating of exile in poems, stories, novels, and essays, I have chosen two articles: one is pre-1967 and entitled "Jerusalem: Time Embodied," and the other is post-1967 and entitled "The Palestinian Exile as Writer." The year 1967 stands out in the psyche of all Palestinians as the painful year in which they lost the whole of their Palestine, including their Jerusalem, after a six-day war in June between the Arabs and Israel. This year saw the beginning of a continuing process of soul-searching, self-analysis, cultural self-criticism, and inner reconstruction in intellectual circles all over the Arab world. Jabra's former article on Jerusalem written in Arabic received widespread acclaim by Arabs but may be little known in the West; so I translated it into English to bring to the notice of the English-reading public the importance of Jerusalem to Palestinians and the deep-seated feeling about its being an Arab city long before it was ever associated with the Jews. Nothing has happened to change this feeling since the



article was written in 1965 and nothing will, I think. Jabra's latter article on the Palestinian exile was originally written in English but was not sufficiently known in the West because of the limited distribution of the publication in which it first appeared.

By publishing these two articles of Jabra in *Jusoor*, it is hoped that English-readers will gain deeper insights into this extraordinary man's life and thought. At the same time, it is also hoped that the fact of Palestinian exile will be better understood so that justice should be rightly perceived as the real and only framework for peace in the Middle East, now that both Jews and Arabs have formally engaged each other in a mood of reconciliation.

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## I THE PALESTINIAN EXILE AS WRITER\*

Way back in 1952 I wrote about the Wandering Palestinian having replaced the Wandering Jew. A historical horror, which over the centuries had acquired the force of a myth, seemed after 1948 to come alive again. It was ironical that the new wanderers should be driven into the wilderness by the old wanderers themselves. Each time, in those days, I travelled from my anchorage in Bethlehem out into the world's capitals, looking for a living, the sense of the world's wilderness intensified further. If anyone used the word "refugee" with me, I was furious. I was not seeking refuge. None of my Palestinian co-wanderers were seeking refuge. We were offering whatever talent or knowledge we had, in return for a living, for survival. We were knowledge peddlers pausing at one more stop on our seemingly endless way. When in the Autumn of 1948 the customs men asked me upon arrival in Baghdad to open my luggage for inspection I offered them a battered suitcase full of books and papers, a small box full of paints and brushes, and half a dozen paintings on plywood. I was not a refugee, and I was proud as hell.

In those days my mother, my brothers and I had found a couple of small rooms on top of an old ramshackle house in Bethlehem— but with a magnificent view of the Valley of the

Shepherds. We had to leave our house in Jerusalem for the invaders, the morning after they had blown up the Semiramis Hotel— almost next door to us— in the small hours of a cold stormy night, killing so many people, some of whom I personally knew, including one of my dearest friends. Innocently, we thought we were leaving our house for a mere two or three weeks. It is amazing what five or ten miles can do to your sense of distance, when your home has been occupied and you cannot return to it. In Bethlehem, I felt as though I was ten thousand miles away from the city which I could see across the valley. The Zionist guns trained in our direction were not a mere physical barrier: they were a lethal reminder that our city, for us, was to be now no more than a memory, a dream, that we were now back to zero. Enjoy the view, if you can, in the midst of the homeless thousands. But you've been plucked out by the roots. Your books, your ideas, your visions: they're absurd indicators to a world where the absurd rules supreme. Hang on to your faith and enjoy them, if you can, when you don't know where your next loaf of bread will come from.

On the very day the Israeli state was declared I knew that the dislodged population was to be deliberately called "refugees", that the horrific political and human issue would be so twisted that the maximum reponse it might elicit from a then weary world would be some act of charity, if at all. The Second World War refugees were still filling transit camps in Europe, in the process of their being "settled" outside their home countries, and we would be lumped together with them, at worst another demographic case for the United Nations, thus adding no further burden to a world conscience already fully burdened. Universal sympathy had already been blunted in a manner that suited the new Joshuas pulling down the walls of Jericho, if not by their raucous horns, then by the planned destruction of a nation soon to be hailed by hack novelists and propagandists in America and Europe as a heroic "return". From holocaust to holocaust. In a twentieth century world full of newspaper

correspondents, films, radio broadcasts and what have you, we might have been the inhabitants of a Jericho of immemorial times. You crush the unarmed inhabitants somehow, you terrorize them by bullet and gelignite, you throw two dozen corpses of their murdered men, women and children into a well, and you drive them out: they'll send their S.O.S. to their neighbouring cousins (the ancient Amorites and Jebusites must have done the same thing, with similar results) and their cousins, already more subtly terrorized, will dispatch a few bedraggled soldiers and volunteers simply to prove that nothing could really be done. Tell the victims now: "You're refugees, don't make a nuisance of yourselves, we'll do something about it. Refugee aid after a few months will trickle in: you'll be numbered and housed in tattered tents and tin shacks. And try and forget, please. Hang on to your rocks wherever you are, and try to forget".

But then a society is not just a collection of men and women surviving together anywhere. A man belongs to some undefinable order of complex relationships which, once disrupted, takes a long time in reforming, though perhaps along a new pattern. And many of the men and women who, like me, were thus torn away from their original "pattern" seemed to be catapulted into space: they would finally land somewhere, no doubt, battered but not necessarily destroyed. Bashed in, but not always and not quite completely wrecked. There is an essence that is not so easy to destroy, however impaired, it seems. Forgetting, however, was just not possible. And refugee status was a thing they rejected. It was unthinkable. Clinging hard to their reason, they had begun to traverse the cosmic absurd. Thus began the Thirty Years (so far) of Palestinian exile.

Bethlehem was the scene of my childhood until I was twelve— a scene I have always remembered with special love and written much about since. But going back to it from Jerusalem at gun-point in 1948 was not exactly going back to one's grass roots. I went to it from a shambles; a temporary

resting place with the qualities of a nightmare. It was one huge chaos of people fleeing from nearby towns and villages, all in a horrible daze. The place was simply not viable. One could not fight, could not work, could not make a living of any kind. People demanded to fight, but no arms were forthcoming from anywhere. They talked, cried, gathered and dispersed in a way that made no sense. And yet when our money had run out, with what painful reluctance I left it in search of a living.

But leaving it was another kind of horror. Going down to Transjordan, I was one of several thousand young people with some education looking for a mainstay of some sort for themselves and their families. Transjordan was another country then, and a passport official near the Allenby Bridge of those days demanded a bribe before he would stamp my passport. I refused to comply; I simply did not have the money. In Amman, I needed a Lebanese visa in order to be able to go to Damascus or Beirut—I had thought I might get a teaching job at the American University of Beirut if I managed to get to Lebanon. But the Lebanese Consulate was not accommodating. One was not allowed to go beyond a petty clerk's desk to put in an application for a visa: he simply said, "No visa. We have enough people like you in Beirut". By luck I met in the street one of my old Transjordanian students, now an influential young businessman. By sheer resourcefulness he got me a certain kind of merchant's document which seemed to persuade some official in the Foreign Office to issue a letter in my favour requesting the Lebanese Consulate that I be granted a visa. So I obtained the visa. And off I went to Beirut, and stayed with a Palestinian friend, Ali Kamal, who was teaching medicine at the AUB. I could see he was not well: he was struggling hard against a nervous breakdown, because he had lost his home and could not tolerate his work.

The American University there, it transpired, was not exactly waiting for my arrival. I was received very kindly by the Vice-President, who regarded my academic credentials with

genuine interest but said, "Alas! Too late for the present academic year, and too early for the next. We'll have your name on our files". A week later I had to go to Damascus, but before leaving Beirut I was warned, if I wanted finally to return to Palestine (i.e. what was left of it), I had to get a transit visa for Transjordan, which had no consulate in Damascus. So off I went to the Transjordan Consulate in Beirut.

A young man intercepted me in the lobby on the way to the consul's office: "No visa", he said. Hell, I said. Let me try. A clerk at the office looked at my passport. "Palestinian? No visa," he said. But how am I to return home— since my way to it is only through Transjordan, and Lebanon will grant me no work and no residence permit? "It's none of my concern," he said. "Don't make a nuisance of yourself." Out I went, and the young man in the lobby said, "You see? No visa. But"—and he put his lips to my ear—"if you give me three Palestinian pounds (about 30 Lebanese pounds then), I'll get it for you in a second." Go to hell, I said.

I hurried back to my friend who was waiting for me at the offices of a then well-known newspaper, and told him [what happened to me]. The editor heard the story, and pulled out a sheet of paper. He wrote me a letter of introduction to the consul, who fortunately was one of his close friends. "Take it to him personally", he said, "and I'll give him a phone call in the meantime". And that did the trick. When I got my transit visa, the clerk in the consul's office gave me a dirty look. The man in the lobby was not much kinder.

My fortnight in Damascus, bleak and hopeless at first, suddenly ended in a decisive, almost fateful way. There was no job to be had for me in Syria, although some of my colleagues and companions, who had beaten me to it, seemed luckier. The city was beautiful: I remembered how two summers earlier I had stayed as a tourist at the Orient Palace, its best hotel then, in comparative luxury. Nothing of the sort now, of course. One felt unwanted, redundant, and rather silly trying to sell one's

own academic credentials in a saturated market. Palestinian teachers were everywhere, including the older ones who had been my own teachers. It was in Damascus that I heard on the radio that Count Bernadotte had been assassinated by Zionist terrorists. On the following morning I accompanied a friend to the Iraqi Embassy, where a cultural attaché was interviewing applicants for teaching jobs in Iraq. For some weeks I had resisted the idea of going to Baghdad for work: it seemed so far away from Jerusalem. I had said I wouldn't go to Baghdad even if its streets were paved with gold.

The cultural attaché was kind. Though not much over thirty, with his bald head and large bright eyes, and a Peterson pipe which he kept smoking, he looked very academic. For a moment he would not consider my request: he said he was that morning announcing the results of the applications that had been put in many days earlier, and it looked as if he had enough of them to meet his requirements. But another look at me, and at the Cambridge Certificate I shyly unrolled before his eyes, changed his mind at once. "Where have you been all this time?" he said with delightful surprise. "Here!" And right away he filled in a form. I was being offered a one-year contract, renewable, to teach at the so-called higher institutions of Baghdad—which meant teaching at a college. The man, I knew later, was no other than Dr. Abdul-Aziz Duri, a famed Iraqi historian who was a year later to be the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, where I had become a member of the staff, and some ten or twelve years later the first President of the New Baghdad University.

I was given an Iraqi visa on the spot. The very same day I travelled back to Amman—my transit visa was in order—and the following morning I was in a rickety old car, together with four other passengers, climbing up the ever-twisting, ever-eroded, ever-potholed road back to Palestine, to Bethlehem. I had to collect a few things. Two or three days later I was going down the same road again. And off, across the

desert; to Baghdad. For just nine months, I said to my brothers. How was I to know that the nine month interlude was to extend into a lifetime?

When Balzac first went to Paris, he said he wanted love and fame. When I went to Baghdad, I could hardly expect love or fame: I went as an exile into an unknown, untried terrain. I stayed in the cheapest hotels, fed in the cheapest restaurants. The first few weeks (my college was slow in getting started) were long and grim: like every exile before me, I loafed about, wrote endless letters to others and endless poems for myself. I read Frazer and Schopenhauer, sitting on a shaky balcony over noisy Rashid Street, thinking of home, the streets of Jerusalem. What had this strange, dusty city to offer me?

I wanted to work, to write, to talk. And oddly enough, that was exactly what the city soon offered me. Some time later, on Baghdad radio, I gave broadcasts in English on Palestine which were probably only heard by the monitors at the British Embassy. My best piece, I seem to remember, was a poem entitled "Palestine Refugee Blues" which I wrote as a "sequel" to W.H. Auden's "Jewish Refugee Blues". I was given quarters at the college where I taught. And I loved the students, all hand-picked scholars being prepared to be sent to universities abroad. I met some of the most delightful "angry" and "desperate" young poets and artists of the city. In fact, I was surrounded by them almost day and night, in tea-shops and in my college quarters much to the annoyance of the Acting Dean, a diehard stick-in-the-mud, who told me that if I was not careful I would be turning my room into a den of rebels who, for all he knew, might be wanted by the police. In the college, I started a debating society, a music society, and on festive occasions I danced the *dabkeh* with the students. A year later I started a dramatic group and a studio for amateur painters for them. What wonderful material for a new era, I thought. I preached change, unashamedly. We had been cheated and betrayed by a thousand years of decay, I said. We had been the victims of our



beautiful inane rhetoric. We lost Palestine, because we had confronted a ruthless modern force with an outmoded tradition. Everything had to change. And change had to begin at the base, with a change of vision. A new way of looking at things. A new way of saying things. A new way of approaching and portraying man and the world.

At college, that first year, one half of the staff were Palestinians—Zuhdi Jarallah, Mahmoud al-Hout, Fahd Rimawi and myself—and the other half British, among whom was an eager young man just down from Oxford, Desmond Stewart. He was soon to be one of us: a great talker bursting with ideas, soon also to acquire the reputation of a brilliant writer.

There were quite a few Palestinian professors, all newcomers like me, in the other colleges. Some were first-class mathematicians from Cambridge, others were engineers, economists, historians. In our various fields we all tacitly insisted on one thing: a high standard of teaching. We often changed syllabuses in pursuit of more challenging courses for the students. Our teacher-student relationship was mostly rather unorthodox. It was so close and inter-communicative, which did not always earn the admiration of officialdom. The thing did not last very long: in three or four years we had dispersed again.

But in three or four years I was amazed how much, in spite of everything, I had actually done: lecturing, teaching, writing, painting, travelling, going through a maze of intense relationships. I remembered Balzac again. Baghdad was certainly not Paris. But the famed age-old city, once ravaged by centuries of neglect and now going through the agonies and thrills of a strange rebirth, could still offer its own gifts of love and fame for all their worth to a man who remained, to all intents and purposes, a restless exile.

In August 1952, I married an Iraqi girl and a month later we were on a ship sailing to the United States. I went to Harvard on a research fellowship. Less than two years later I was back in Baghdad.

## II

The sense of loss in an exile is unlike any other sense of loss. It is a sense of having lost a part of an inner self, a part of an inner essence. An exile feels incomplete even though everything he could want physically were at his fingertips. He is obsessed by the thought that only a return home could do away with such a feeling, end the loss, reintegrate the inner self. Back at home in a few years I had seen a kind of a new Arab society taking shape, especially in Jerusalem, the absence of which, or my forced separation from which, filled me with that painful sense. Members of my generation had given that society a certain colour, a certain significance and cohesion, which we discovered after its disruption to have been different, almost unique, Arabwise. Some of it in later years nearly reshaped, in a strange hybrid way, in Beirut, the city which witnessed the gathering of the largest number of talented and enterprising Palestinians. But even in Beirut it was a society in exile, however brilliant its members. Doomed, unless somehow saved. It would contribute to the local scene in a hundred ways, but always on sufferance. It was not a mere question of alienation, a grouping made up of a lot of uprooted individuals: the malaise was deeply collective and deeply personal at once. One was uprooted as a person, and uprooted as a group, and both seemed to float away by a mysterious impulsion. Palestinians as individuals had become wanderers. You find them in their wanderings in Egypt, Iraq, Kuwait, along the shores of the Arabian Gulf, in England, in the United States, in India, anywhere you could think of. In a few years the dispersal was completely global.

They grouped, splintered off, regrouped and splintered off again. A sense of looking for the lost part of the inner self haunted them, impelled them to keep moving. And each Palestinian was an exile after his own fashion, even within the Arab world. Tawfiq Sayigh, who tried exile in the United

States, England and Lebanon, had a famous dictum: "Worse than exile abroad is exile within one's own homeland", meaning by homeland the Arab world. The dominant theme of his poetry was, in fact, exile. (He died as an exile at Berkeley, California, and was buried there in a vast cemetery, with a Chinaman on his right, a Japanese on his left: a stranger to the end.)

Within the universal tragedy of dispossession, dislodgement and massacre engulfing a whole people, everyone of us had, of course, his own personal sorrows in the violent loss of friends and relatives. In the midst of the upheaval of May 1948, the death of a dear friend in Jerusalem from a Jewish shell symbolized for me at least one aspect of the complex tragedy. Albert Atallah was a young man whose love had embraced the world: he was a member of the Arts Club committee (of which I was president) and always saw that the lectures and concerts given by the Club were attended by Jews as well as Arabs. A shell splitted him up and entangled him with his own bowels. Such shocks came in rapid succession. One kept picking up bits of news about one's friends: killed, scattered, lost.

In Baghdad I wrote letters in every direction, trying to keep track of the people I knew, not always successfully. In 1951 I at last saw an old Jerusalem friend I had not seen for four years, since the declaration of the Partition Plan: Theo Canaan. He was indeed establishing himself as a leading architect in Beirut, just as I thought I was establishing myself as a university professor in Baghdad. Neither of us, however, could really deceive ourselves: I stayed with him in an old house he had beautifully remodelled in Ain Mraiech, very close to the sea, but we only talked about Jerusalem. Our friends, we said, were being tossed about like flotsam on a violent sea: we could envisage their faces as they were hurled away from one another, hurled back for an instant to one another, then dashed away into the invisible—the final dispersal where no sea could bring them back together again, except in imagination. Theo

thought he was creating Jerusalem-inspired architecture in Lebanon; his neighbor, Elie Beitjaly, another Palestinian, was writing little gem-like stories in the form of parables about the human condition, while I was writing short stories about the Jerusalem of the days of innocence. All of us were, through art, reliving our original Palestinian experience. Every articulate Palestinian was doing this in one way or another: it was the wanderer's attempt to hang on to his vision, to keep the inner essence intact.

In time, the sense of belonging to Palestinian soil, rather than diminishing, was intensified in the exiles. The Israelis had made a grim miscalculation when they thought that the refugees, who were mostly at the time illiterate or semi-literate villagers, would boggle up their own issue into one of mere survival at any cost. Palestinian intellectuals were suddenly everywhere: writing, teaching, talking, doing things, influencing a whole Arab society in most unexpected ways. They were coping with their sense of loss, turning their exile into a force, creating thereby a mystique of being Palestinian. One had to be blind not to see that the whole thing would sooner or later develop in the direction of violent action. Even in their exile the Palestinians became motivators: and whenever attempts were made to strike them down, their motivating power seemed to acquire even greater momentum.

In the mid-1950's I remember talking about the Faust syndrome in Palestinian intellectuals. I wrote a poem entitled "Soliloquy of a Modern Faust": the Palestinian as thinker, as collector of books and ideas, as organizer of experience and observation now making his compact with Mephistopheles in return for action. He will go through the cities of the world "like the night, like the storm", possess Helen and dally with Margaret, ever on the move, driven by a "godly lust, a giant's appetite", finally to demand an apocalypse, an involvement in a cataclysmic act: the world might end "with a whimper", but exile could only end "with a bang".

The Palestinian wanderers, as I said, went everywhere. I, for one, found my way in a few years to several countries besides Iraq: France, the United States, England. Whereas a large number of my friends stuck it out in these countries, many of them distinguishing themselves in their professions there, I insisted on coming back to the Arab world. If exile it had to be, I thought, let it then be, for me, exile in a world which, after my Iraqi experience, I felt to be a world of tomorrow. The "land of opportunity" in the fifties I took to be the Arab world, where the 19th century American idea of "pushing the frontiers west" seemed now to apply most: the terrain, in spite of all the apparent instability, seemed to offer the prospect of a people vigorously pushing their intellectual, economic and social frontiers toward a kind of health and power which, however long it might take, would bring about the regeneration of the nation. And the Palestinians, though often molested, maligned, imprisoned, deported, were always in the vanguard with the pioneers.

Right from the start Palestinians had declared that their fate and the fate of the Arab nation were interlocked, were in fact one. Palestinians could not fail, except by the failure of the whole Arab nation. But they also knew that so much depended on themselves: on their efficacy as a leavening force for a meaningful future for Arabs everywhere.

In 1957 in Baghdad I met Arnold Toynbee, who was then on a tour of the Arab countries. As a great thinker who saw civilization as a recurrence of historical patterns, he seemed to have a very high opinion of the role of the Palestinians (many of whom he had met personally on his travels) in Arab society. He said that wherever he went he found Palestinians in leading positions; they were the unacknowledged pace-setters of the Arab world. He likened their expulsion from their country to the expulsion by the Turks of the Greek thinkers and artists from Byzantium in 1453; these thinkers then spread throughout Europe and were a major factor in ending the European dark

ages and bringing about the Renaissance. The Palestinians, he told me, were having the same seminal influence on the Arab world. It was their fate to be the germinators of a new age, the heralds of a new civilization. Then he added another parallel: more than once in the past, Palestine had released into the world a force of radical change, notably when the Apostles of Christ went out, unwanted in their own land, to create abroad in the form of Christianity one of the greatest changes in human history. Crucifixion was of course to be expected: but St. Peter's Church was later erected on the spot where the barefoot Apostle had been crucified upside down. Neither Jesus nor his twelve disciples could possibly have been Jews: they actually belonged to the indigenous Palestinian racial groups on whom Israel and Judah had for centuries imposed their own exclusive society, itself always subject to foreign powers.

It was a comfort of sorts, I suppose, to think in such historical terms, but the sense of exile was not any the less acute. Most of the creative work of my generation would have to be seen in this light. It was a mixture of nostalgia and anticipation: a mixture of past and future, with very little present to speak of. For Palestinians, the creation of a modern national literature, in fact, took place in exile in the first decade of Palestinian dispersal, in this agony of time past and time to come. Until 1948, intellectually, we were rather like an appendage of Egypt. We had two or three good poets and four or five good prose writers who, nevertheless, would never have found their way into an anthology of Arabic writing then. But by 1960, the literary scene had completely changed. In the sixties, Palestinian poets at home under Israeli occupation, having absorbed the influence of the exile writers, erupted upon the scene with voices of fire. By 1970, Palestinian poetry and fiction had given Arabic writing everywhere a colouring, a force, a style, distinctively their own.

For me until 1967, exile from Jerusalem was the central fact of my life, however much I participated in the literary and

artistic activity of Baghdad and, indeed, of Beirut. My short stories (the last of which I wrote in 1956) were basically about my pre-1948 experience in Bethlehem and Jerusalem. The novels I wrote after that date, it appears to me now, were an expression of the anxiety of banishment: I was grappling with the endless theme of a Palestinian exile in an Arab world which he loved and observed, worried about and wanted to change. Like Wadi' Assaf in my novel "Al-Safina" (The Ship), the Palestinian sailed away only to ache more deeply for his return, to ache more bitterly for his grass roots. In the meantime he was enraged to see the Arab world blundering on in agony—groping for a way out of its wilderness, and getting lost again. Not only in a political, but more so in a psychological sense. Salvation was hard. And so slow in forthcoming.

June 1967, for some months, seemed to have put the lid on for me. Even my occasional pauses in Bethlehem, hitherto possible as an invigorating ritual, became impossible. The essence, so dearly guarded until then, seemed to have been hit. I had to make sure that it was nursed back to health. But Palestinians, in twenty years, though exiles, though dispersed throughout the world, had gone through their baptism of fire and had been regenerated: however seemingly fragmented, they had become a nation. And, like any nation, they had to be reckoned with, perhaps for the first time since the beginning of their struggle against Zionism half a century earlier. Disaster at last had done its worst. Its only effect now, paradoxically, could be to break the dam and release the pent-up flood that had been rising for twenty years. All of which is another story.

The Palestinian may still be an exile and a wanderer, but his voice is raised in anger, not in lamentation. More tragedies have befallen him, more vicious attempts are made to contain him, but his sense of nationhood, so unshakable, is backed up now by a capacity for action more resourceful and more versatile than ever. The wilderness has brought forth fruit? Certainly, but very little of it is smooth to touch or sweet to

taste. It will continue to be so until the exile finds, or forces, his way back to his soil.

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## JERUSALEM: TIME EMBODIED

Translated from the Arabic by  
*Issa J. Boullata*

The city of Jerusalem is not merely a place; it is time as well. It cannot be clearly seen in its limited geographical setting only, for then it will not be understood. It should be seen in historical perspective, and seen indeed as though history--the history of four thousand years--is compressed in one moment, namely, the moment it is being seen by someone. For history is alive in this city, whose every stone spells that out. It is a history full of contradiction, full of tragedy. But it is also the history of a city passionately loved by all mankind, for never has it been a merely spatial city of stone, clay, trade, and politics. It has always been a city of dreams, of eagerness, of the human soul's yearning for God. It has proudly stood on a mountain, overlooking the sea on one side and the desert on the other. Within its walls, it has combined the meanings of sea and desert: two civilizational forces in eternal interaction. And in this interaction lie both the secret of its tragedy and that of its greatness.

Although originally, until the end of the last century, Jerusalem had been known to be the walled city with its seven gates, it began to overflow beyond its walls more than seventy years ago and was thus gradually joined to the suburbs surrounding it on all four sides. This expansion began to accelerate after a part of the wall near Bab al-Khalil [Jaffa

Gate\*] was pulled down in 1898, for that made possible the organic integration of the city's outer extensions with its inner walled section.

The oldest extension outside the city wall consisted of Prophet David's Neighborhood to the south, going back a few centuries. But the greatest extensions developed between 1920 and 1948 to the north, to the west, and to the south at the same time.

Here grew the new parts of Jerusalem, stretching from Jaffa Road on one side, and from Ma'man Allah [Mamillah] Road, Ma'man Allah [Mamillah] Cemetery, and St. Julian's Way on the other, especially after the YMCA building was completed on St. Julian's Way in the early thirties. Thus, direct connections were established between the outlying areas of the new Jerusalem and the Old City itself.

In the middle of the last century, the Germans established the German Colony a few kilometers from the city wall. The Greek Colony followed and then other neighborhoods and convents were built here and there belonging to the Catholics, the Greek Orthodox, and others. Then some Jewish neighborhoods were also built--with funds from a Jewish Englishman, Sir Moses Montefiore. From that time and until the end of the twenties, the areas of Upper Baq'a, Talibiyya, and Qatamon became places of recreation and summer resorts for the people of Jerusalem, owned by individuals from Jerusalem and Bethlehem. But all these areas underwent city planning in the thirties and were built up within one vast area surrounding most of the walled city. And thus grew the contemporary city of Jerusalem with its two parts, the old and the new. In this manner, the rocky areas, thickly grown with olive trees and interspersed with houses that were few and far between, were transformed within a few years into beautiful neighborhoods with stone buildings, many gardens, and modern planning.

The first thing one must say here about Jerusalem is that

it is an Arab city whose Arab character is deep-rooted, despite the fact that Zionists have occupied its newer half. For its occupied newer half is as Arab as its older half and the rest of occupied Palestine. When a Jerusalemite [Arab] speaks about his city, it is impossible for him to restrict his speech to the walled city and to the expansion and development around it that took place in the period following the [1948] Catastrophe. Jerusalem with all its parts is a single organic unit, and it is illogical to divide it in such a criminal way. Its present division is nothing but a small-scale replica of the mental folly that unjustly allotted a part of Palestine to the Jews. Although many years have passed over this grave injustice, a Jerusalemite [Arab] can never imagine his city shorn of its occupied half with its Arab neighborhoods, Arab homes, and Arab character.

For this reason, I must here begin to speak from a purely personal point of view.

I used to live in a depression outside the city wall below Prophet David's Hill called Jawrat al-`Unnab (Jujube Pit). It was one of those first neighborhoods that had begun to grow outside Jerusalem toward the end of the last century and the beginnings of this one. I witnessed its gradual transformation from an animal market held every Friday to an industrial area with workshops for blacksmiths, carpenters, and founders. As a boy in the early thirties, I worked in one of those shops during two successive summer holidays for a daily wage of two and a half piasters.

Our home consisted of one room in a large building, whose ground floor was below the level of the public road. The building had an open, square courtyard to which one descended by stairs. On the sides of the courtyard were rooms, in each of which a whole family lived. From the door of our room, I used to see Prophet David's minaret towering above us from a commanding height. Because this room had only a little window near the door in which we piled up our books and school things, the landlord permitted us to make a little square

opening at the top of the wall opposite the door to help the ventilation. This window was exactly level with the ground of the public road, which was not asphalted in those days, and we put a metal screen on it and a little curtain. I was accustomed to wake up before dawn, on the sound of peasant women coming from the nearby villages carrying baskets of vegetables to the market. They used to sit near our upper window to rest from their exhausting walk, before reaching the vegetable market at Bab al-Khalil [Jaffa Gate]. They and their animals made a lot of noise.

During my student days, I used to ascend daily from the Jawra to Bab al-Khalil [Jaffa Gate], which surged with cars and buses, with boxes of fruits and vegetables, and with sellers, buyers, and porters. Then I went to Rashidiyya School--which still stands on the same spot outside Bab al-Sahira [Herod's Gate]--either by way of Bab al-Khalil [Jaffa Gate] and through the Old City or by way of Jaffa Road, going up to the Old Post Office building, passing by the Boulos Sa'id Bookshop, then descending 'Aqabat al-Manzil past al-Bab al-Jadid [New Gate], the French Hospital and the Notre Dame Convent next to it, and on to Musrara Quarter and Bab al-'Amud [Damascus Gate]. Today [1965], all these areas are part of no-man's-land full of debris and barbed wires. When one looks westward from Bab al-'Amud [Damascus Gate], one sees the massive building of the [Notre Dame] Convent across the barbed wires, having been transformed into horrible ruins in a violent battle that took place between the Arabs and the Jews in 1948, when the Jews wanted to make it the bridgehead from which to storm al-Bab al-Jadid [New Gate] and capture the Old City but were confronted by the [Palestinian] fighters and the [Jordanian] Arab Army in a fierce engagement that made them take to their heels.

We later moved to another neighborhood lying between Ma'man Allah [Mamillah] Road and Shamma'a Quarter. Since the time preceding the famous strike of 1936, Jerusalem had been growing quickly and this growth was

resumed after the strike. In this period, the Arab College was built on Mount al-Mukabbir, south of Jerusalem. Its dean was the late Professor Ahmad Samih al-Khalidi. As far as I was concerned, my daily walk turned now southward. After one took the bus going to Upper Baq'a, one walked behind a British Army camp until one reached the top of Mount al-Mukabbir, where the college stood amid large open spaces, some of which were playgrounds, surrounded by hundreds of pine seedlings. These seedlings grew under our very eyes into little trees between 1935 and 1938.

I spent my last year at the Arab College as a boarder, and I shall never forget the view of Jerusalem across the Rababa Valley: in the daytime it was bathed in violet clouds and at night it shone and sparkled.

In those days, as always until the [1948] Catastrophe put an end to it, the Arab College had about one hundred and twenty students selected from the outstanding ones of all the schools of Palestine. Besides their intelligence, most of them distinguished themselves by their tremendous ability to study hard, so much so that it was one of the tasks of college authorities to curb their desire to study "secretly" during the night, after bedtime hour! It is no wonder that a large number of young men graduated from the college and that many of them have become among the well-known Arabs today. At night, from this hermitage of ours, we used to look for hours at Jerusalem from the very same mountain on which `Umar ibn al-Khattab stood, one thousand and three hundred years before us, to look at Bayt al-Maqdis for the first time. "Successive Pleiades, a continuation of the heavenly stars": thus we described the glittering city in the dark across the valley which used to be called the Valley of Gehenna [Hell] in ancient times. Meanwhile, we spoke ceaselessly about all that concerned the young, and especially about literature and politics, in addition to our difficult lessons, which some of us learnt by heart by walking and walking around the vast playgrounds while

"cramming" endlessly.

A few years afterwards, we moved house again. This time we moved westward to Qatamon, a suburb on the top of a hill overlooking rocky slopes on one side reaching a valley with a road leading to the village of Maliha, and slopes on the other side full of beautiful stone houses by which Jerusalem is distinguished. By the beginning of 1947, Jerusalem reached the height of its expansion and splendor. However, three years earlier, Jewish terrorists had begun to destroy the new Jerusalem in accordance with a barbarous plan, starting first with blowing up government centers, one after another. (One of the most famous places they blew up with all those in it was the Secretariat General of the Government, occupying a wing of the King David Hotel.) After the [United Nations] Partition Plan was announced in November 1947, they began blowing up Arab homes by night, especially in Qatamon which was next to the Jewish neighborhood of Rehavia. This they did in order to terrorize the inhabitants and force them to flee. The Arabs started to respond to the challenge and, in a matter of a few months, new Jerusalem became a frightening labyrinth of barbed wires, abandoned homes, and strewn ruins conversing with one another by bullets day and night.

I remember new Jerusalem, usurped Jerusalem, as Adam remembers Paradise. As a boy grows, his city grows in every cranny of his soul. His boyhood is only a reflection of the hundreds of streets, houses, shops, alleys, trees, planted spots which become green in spring and yellow in winter, and rocks scattered all over, that make up his city. Where does the subject end and the object begin here? A street in which the boy weeps, is hungry, laughs, loves a girl who smiled to him unintentionally and whose name he does not know, a street in which he ran in the rain, in the dark, with his brothers, with his parents, with dozens of his friends whose voices echoing between the buildings he still hears in his mind: can such a street remain a mere objective geometric extension? And if the



enemy came, destroyed the sidewalks with his tanks, blew up the homes with all those in them, uprooted relatives and friends, and cast the boy, now a young man, across valleys, across deserts, to other streets and other homes: can he see in all that anything other than a wrongful attempt to split his self when the self must not be split? Hence, the feeling of every Palestinian that he must return, for return is more than regaining land usurped by the enemy: it is regaining the other part of the self. It is regaining the whole self.

Some of the commonplace things of history are those many cities that were built, that expanded and rose high, and then were wrecked by earthquakes or demolished by invading armies and transformed into ruins that were wiped out under the effect of the winds of time or were buried under heaps of soil over the centuries, with a column here, an arch there, and stones uncovered by archeologists in the middle of a desolate desert. But the miracle of history is this city which human beings have sanctified, and which they have also subjected to destruction and ruination; and yet it is wounded but does not die, it goes to pieces then it recovers and comes to life anew.

The first people who built it were Semitic tribes who came from Arabia and who were generally called Canaanites, although we know that the later ones of them were also known as Jebusites. These Arabs built Jerusalem in about 2500 B.C. and named it Uru-Shalim (City of Peace). They chose its site most probably because of its relative impregnability in the midst of a region rich in wheat, olives, and vineyards as well as because of the presence of the Fountain of Silwan, which was perhaps included within it in its earliest planning. Remains of the original Jebusite wall and citadel were recently discovered.

Jerusalem resisted the attacks of the Hebrews for a long time after they had come to the land of Palestine as invaders seeking to settle in it. They entered the city only by violence, about fifteen centuries after it had been established. When King David made it his capital in about 1000 B.C., he undoubtedly



chose it because it was a perfect Canaanite city that was an important center of worship. Thus, he made good use of all its advantageous qualities: its impregnability, its centrality, and its status in the eyes of the inhabitants who still worshiped the ancient god, Tammuz, mourning his death with dirges and celebrating his resurrection in Spring and the restoration of fertility to the earth with his return.

The Hebrews imposed themselves on the city's original inhabitants only by force. Even the books of the Torah witness to this fact, despite the textual alteration which the ancient Jewish scribes made in them. The Hebrews were known for their harsh treatment of those they conquered, claiming that Jehovah commanded them to kill every woman, old man, and child in addition to male adults and even horses, cattle, and all other animals in the land. Perhaps the history of Sebastia near Nablus, if one can read between its lines, shows that the "strangers" (i.e., the original inhabitants) who clung to their gods and angered the Jews, thus permitting the Syrians, then the Greeks, and then the Romans to exploit their conflict with them, remained in their own land, Palestine, century after century, as a thorn in the side of the Hebrew invaders and their coercive rule.

The first great destruction of the city came at the hands of the ancient Iraqis. During successive periods of Jewish rule, Palestine was a victim to Pharaonic armies on one side and Assyrian armies on the other. The Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar, was not satisfied with the conquest of 586 B.C. but demolished a large part of Jerusalem, particularly [King] Solomon's Temple. He also razed the city's fortifications, took the leading Jews as captives to the land of Iraq, and settled them on the Euphrates River. Among the tragedies of history is that Babylon itself, with all its civilization and glory, finally fell into the hands of the Persians as a result of its intense conflict with the north on one side and the east on the other. It was natural that the Persians would help

Babylon's enemies to take revenge on it, so they returned the Jews to Jerusalem to rebuild [King] Solomon's Temple as well as the walls of the city, after half a century of captivity away from it.

However, in spite of these efforts, the authority of the Jews over Jerusalem did not remain absolute for a long time. For the city fell under the aegis of Alexander's successors since the end of the fourth century B.C. and became part of the Aramaean-Hellenistic civilization, in which the common people spoke Aramaic and the intellectuals wrote in Greek, while Hebrew had no more than a religious, ritualistic value even among its own people. The Aramaean or "Syriac" civilization (See Arnold Toynbee's *A Study of History*) was the ancient civilization from which the later Arab civilization proceeded; it was therefore a continuation, in Palestine, of the Canaanite Arab situation as far as atmosphere and thought.

Rome succeeded the Hellenes in ruling Jerusalem, especially after the former was besieged by Pompey in 65 B.C. and its temple sacked by Crassus in 54 B.C. Rome appointed kings in the region from a Jewish family with a Hellenistic culture and a Roman leaning, most of whom were called Herod. Although Rome left [in Palestine] a Jewish entity of sorts for some time, it became fed up with the Jews and eventually sent the Roman commander, Titus, to Jerusalem. After besieging the rebels in the city for a long time, he stormed and captured it in the year 70 A.D. and destroyed it as badly as the Babylonians had done about six centuries earlier. A Roman garrison was stationed in it until 132 A.D., when the Jews rebelled once more. The forces of Emperor Hadrian crushed the rebels this time and utterly destroyed the city, devastating its land and decisively expelling the Jews from it. The result was the beginning of the "Diaspora" of the Jews from that time onward. The apparent Jewish character of Jerusalem was gone and [King] Solomon's Temple was destroyed for the last time—although the Jews remembered it for several successive

centuries afterwards as a racial and emotional token. On the ruins of the ancient city, the Romans built a new city they named Aelia Capitolina, after Aelius Hadrianus. On the site of the Temple, they built a temple for Jupiter as was expected.

However, the civilizational character of the city continued to be Aramaic-(Arab)-Greek, and Palestine became truly a part of the Mediterranean civilization. In this period appeared Tadmur, the first Arab petty state to the north of Jerusalem. As Christianity arose--and it was Aramaeo-Greek in origin--and as the large churches were built by the Byzantine state in the fourth century onwards, such as the Church of the Nativity and the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, Jerusalem returned to its proper and natural status as far as the inhabitants were concerned, despite the Byzantine authority that remained in the country.

Strangely enough, the Persians who had returned the Jews from Babylon, were about to do that again when they attacked Palestine once more and destroyed Jerusalem in 614 A.D. under the leadership of Chosroes II. They expressed their historical rancor against the Greeks this time by trying to destroy Christianity in its own land. They brought back to Jerusalem thousands of Jews who bore a grudge against the Christians because the latter had never allowed them to return to the city. The Jews and their Persian overlords massacred the inhabitants and destroyed edifices and churches. Jerusalem was sacked and thousands of its inhabitants were killed. If one goes to Saint Saba's monastery today, which is situated on the barren hills to the south-east of Jerusalem, one sees the piles of skulls which, the monks say, are the skulls of those killed in that barbaric campaign. (The Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem was spared in those days because the Persians saw the image of the Three Magi with Christ as a baby on its door, so they refrained from harming it.)

In the same manner as the Persians came, they also went and with them went the Jews. Byzantine authority returned to

the city at the hands of Heraclius until the arrival of the Arab armies in 637 A.D. and their four-month siege, first by `Amr ibn al-`As and then by Abu `Ubayda ibn al-Jarrah. Finally, [Caliph] `Umar ibn al-Khattab entered it in that famous and admirable manner, wearing a patched cloak so that it might not be said of him that he was haughty or despotic.

It is amazing that the Jews played their usual historical game this time too. They thought that the Arabs had come as conquerors like the Persians, so they wanted to enter the city under the cover of the new army. But they did not succeed in doing so. The "Writ of Safety" (the peace covenant between `Umar ibn al-Khattab and Sophronius, the Patriarch of Jerusalem) says: "...This is what the servant of God, `Umar, the Commander of the Faithful, gave the people of Iliya [Aelia Capitolina] in the way of safety. He gave them safety of their persons, properties, churches, and crosses... Their churches shall not be inhabited or destroyed or encroached upon or partly seized, nor shall their crosses or any of their possessions. They shall not be compelled in their religion and no one of them shall be maltreated, nor shall any one of the Jews inhabit Iliya with them..." Al-Tabari mentions that a Jew urged Caliph `Umar earlier, in a camp near Damascus, saying: "O Commander of the Faithful, do not return to your country until you conquer Iliya by God's grace." But it seems that the intentions of the Jews did not go unnoticed by the people of the city, so they agreed with[`Umar] the just caliph to frustrate them.

And thus Jerusalem retained its Arab character. The remainder of the story is well known: after two hundred years of continuous fighting, the Crusaders failed to take it away from Arab hands (the Crusaders entered it under the leadership of Godefroy de Bouillon in 1099 and Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi [Saladin] snatched it back from them in 1187); the Ottomans seized it under the command of Sulayman al-Qanuni [the Magnificent] in 1517 and the English conquered Palestine and entered Jerusalem exactly four hundred years later; and then the

Jews entered it again under the cover of the new conquerors' protection and help.

Having dismounted, General Allenby entered Jerusalem on foot from Bab al-Khalil [Jaffa Gate] on December 11, 1917. What did he know about the Jewish conspiracy against Jerusalem--and Palestine--when he declared, without correct understanding of history, that that was "the last crusade?" First of all, how did he allow himself to imagine he was a "crusading" conqueror when the Arabs were his partners in the "conquest" and had risen against the Turks only to take their own country away from the Ottoman Turanic yoke, the conflict with Europe at that time not being an issue? Secondly, how did he delude himself to think that he was entering Jerusalem as the Crusaders did, while knowingly or unknowingly he was preparing the way for a handful of Zionists who, since the latter part of the nineteenth century, were busy buying consciences and bargaining with the Ottomans, the English, and others in order to take possession of this Arab land?

As a consequence, Jerusalem witnessed thirty years of terrible political contradiction. For thirty years, the Palestinians struggled against a complex and tyrannical force which did not understand them--or did not want to understand them--and which they did not understand. The first things I remember of my life are demonstrations, troubles, strikes, soldiers, and policemen filling the streets. My generation grew up in a sea of rebellion, disobedience, and tragedy; a sea of fighting and aspiring to freedom; a sea of soldiers shooting thousands of demonstrating men, women, and children; a sea of bombs and barrels of dynamite exploded by Jewish terrorists at the gates of the city and causing torn limbs and flesh fragments of innocent people to fly right and left. Thirty years of curfew, pursuit of young men, imposition of collective punishment on villages where soldiers searched for rebels, then mixed the wheat with the lentils, the soil, and the flour in every home of every village. Thirty years of rebellious poems, fiery speeches, and

assassinations that accompany every revolution.

In spite of all this, there was a miracle. The city continued to grow always. Despite all that was happening, there were schools, however few, which the Arab world had not seen the like of as far as standards of education, and there was order that permitted Jerusalem to develop and thrive and become more beautiful.

What greater miracle could have happened if Jerusalem, like other cities, had security and peace all those thirty years?

One may go to Jerusalem by car or by airplane. Someone coming by car today [1965] has no choice but to approach it from the East, via Amman. In the past, the road from Amman to Jerusalem took more than two hours by car, winding upwards then downwards in Wadi Shu`ayb, then crossing the Jordan River at what was formerly known as Allenby Bridge, which used to be the checkpoint on the border between Palestine and Transjordan. The road then passes through the world's lowest region under sea-level, the Ghawr [Rift Valley] region, then through Ariha [Jericho]. It then winds upwards again, continuing to ascend and turn until it reaches Bayt al-Maqdis at a height of 800 meters above sea-level, that is, a height equivalent to Aley's in Lebanon.

A new road has been recently built between Amman and Jerusalem. It is straight and wide and takes about one hour by car. Just before reaching Jerusalem, the road takes a sharp turn despite its width. Several further turns bring one suddenly into the village of La`azariyya [Bethany], in which Christ resurrected Lazarus. Moments later, one reaches Ra's al-`Amud, whereupon the Old City suddenly comes into view behind its walls that stand on the crest of a rising hill. Buildings, domes, and minarets are then seen, spread out around the open space of al-Haram al-Sharif [The Holy Sanctuary] whose territory and edifices are adjacent to the eastern city wall, and in the midst of everything stands the Dome of the Rock with its glittering golden colors. The visitor then finds himself in a spot which has

the largest number of holy sites. For he will pass by Gethsemane, where Christ was arrested after being betrayed by Judas, and the Church of Our Lady Mary, which is one of the world's strangest churches. For it is all built underground in a great cave going down fifty steps into the depths of the earth, with no opening but the entrance, and it ends up in a bed said to be that of the Virgin, under which the faithful are seen to pass in order to seek her blessing. In the church, there is an old well in which the faithful drop buckets and pull them out to drink from its holy water. On the roof of the church, there is only the rocky surface of the earth full of olive trees, among which there are tombs belonging to the Greek Orthodox community. If the visitor happens to be arriving on the 15th of August, which is the [Dormition] Day of the Virgin Mary, he will find people in the midst of a celebration: ferris wheels turning with children; and celebrants eating, drinking, and singing under the branches of the olive trees. Towering above this scene is a famous mountain, namely, the Mount of Olives, and on its top--when one has the opportunity to climb it--one sees the village of al-Tur and the Church of the Ascension. The spot from which Christ ascended into Heaven is marked by a rock rubbed smooth by the lips and hands of worshipers over the centuries because there is an imprint in it that resembles that of a footprint, said to be the trace of Christ's foot imprinted in the rock at the moment of His ascension to God. But the visitor will see that later on. There, he will also see a large hotel built in the most modern style, standing on that high peak overlooking not only the city but also all that surrounds it: the breath-taking valleys, mountains, and plains stretching eastwards toward the distant horizons, toward the "Blue Mountains" beyond the Dead Sea, and southwards toward Bethlehem and al-Khalil [Hebron].

However, the visitor's car will drive upward from the Church of the Virgin, pass by another church [St. Stephen's], then by the Gate of Our Lady Mary, then turn toward Bab al-Sahira [Herod's Gate], which is the take-off point of the new



city since the [1948] Catastrophe. There, he will make his way through the crowd to the largest entrance of the walled city: Bab al-'Amud [Damascus Gate].

At this moment, the Arab suddenly feels, once again, the incidence of the [1948] Catastrophe as he sees a huge, recently-built wall stretching northwards, crossing the Musrara Quarter to the Shaykh Jarrah Neighborhood to protect the Arabs from the Jewish snipers who occupy the hill on the other side across no-man's-land. The Tragedy thus offers him another handy symbol.

Reaching Jerusalem by airplane is quite easy from most nearby Arab capitals, especially Beirut. From Beirut, there are at least two flights to Jerusalem daily. On its short flight from Beirut, the airplane has naturally to go east to Damascus, then south, and then west [to avoid Israel's air space]. The scene of Jordan from the air is mostly that of a mountainous land of red rocks, in which the passenger suddenly sees River Jordan as a thin line with many bends. A few moments later, he lands at the Qalandiya airport, about ten kilometers north of the city. From there, he goes by car on a modern wide road running between two continuous lines of beautiful and elegant stone buildings of modern style which have made of Bayt Hanina and Shu'fat two of the city's new suburbs. The traveler then reaches the most famous of Jerusalem's elevations, Mount Scopus, whereupon the city spreads out before him at one glance with its two parts, the new and the old, the occupied and the free. It spreads out and shines as though it were made of colorful mother-of-pearl. From here, Christian pilgrims used to make their way to the city--until the arrival of the Ottomans. (The Ottomans made Bab al-Khalil [Jaffa Gate] the only entrance available to the caravans of the pilgrims, who had to reach it in the daytime, because it was closed at sunset). When the pilgrims used to set their eyes on the city bathed in molten hues of rose and violet, it appeared to them as the ideal city and the utopia of their dreams and aspirations. They sank to their knees worshipfully and



kissed the holy soil as they shouted with joy and humble supplication.

The view of the city from here moves the soul with its enchantment and it is surpassed in splendor only by the view from the Mount of Olives, from a spot next to the Church of the Ascension. It must be said here that the Hadassah Hospital and the Hebrew University are in the proximity and that, despite the fact that they are in the heart of the Arab zone, they continue to be like an island protected by the United Nations in the interest of the Jews.

From here, one goes down to the Shaykh Jarrah Neighborhood and is, in a short while, in the midst of the din, the uproar, and the cars of that large, magnificent entrance: Bab al-`Amud [Damascus Gate]. One will immediately realize, no doubt, that one is at the threshold of a city which is one of the richest and most splendid models of an Arab city that has kept its old architectural character since the twelfth century A.D., since the Crusades and the victory of Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi. Although its walls are, for the most part, of Ottoman construction dating back to the sixteenth century, they retain among their stones indications of the city's extremely ancient periods going back more than four thousand years.

As for Bab al-`Amud [Damascus Gate], it was Sulayman al-Qanuni [the Magnificent] who built it in 1537 in a style which brought Ottoman architecture to its climax. This great Sultan wanted to leave in Jerusalem a prominent trace that spoke of his pride in "liberating" the city from the Mamluks, and of his determination to organize the city and to beautify and renew it. Yet, after his death in 1566, not a single building worth mentioning was built for three centuries. The Ottomans did not make an effort to widen the city's roads and reorganize it until Wilhelm I, the German Kaiser and their ally in those days, wanted to visit it in 1897. They undertook works of demolition and restoration that almost allowed even carriages to run in its roads. One result of that remarkable visit, which was

the occasion to pull down part of the city wall near Bab al-Khalil [Jaffa Gate] as we mentioned at the beginning of this article, was the construction on the Mount of Olives of a massive edifice named after Wilhelm's wife, Augusta Victoria, which has become one of the distinct landmarks of the city, northeast of the city wall. Twenty years later, upon the defeat of the Turks and the capture of the Kaiser by the Allies, this tower-like edifice was destined to become the first residence of the Government of the British Mandate. Today, it is a hospital known as the Muttala` Hospital, run by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency [UNRWA].

One of the ironies of history is that the Jerusalem Walls, which were built for an age other than ours and which today seem to be nothing more than a historical remnant of the past, have played a great role in preserving the Arab character of the city in 1948. For they stood the repeated Jewish attacks for a long time, having again become an inhibitive bulwark behind which the [Palestinian] fighters and the [Jordanian] Arab Army fought, repelling the Jews who strove to seize the city, despite the damage done to it by their artillery. The holy city thus remained in the hands of its people and the Jews were finally expelled from it for the last time.

When one enters the city from Bab al-`Amud [Damascus Gate], one is amazed by its crowded but clean roads. Despite the masses teeming in it, the city is radiant and organized, and its inhabitants have lost none of their vitality, activity, and hospitality. This is a city which has always been the goal of thousands of tourists and pilgrims, and its people have never degraded themselves to the practices of touristic cities which do not hesitate to exploit strangers. Jerusalem has been accustomed to masses of visitors who speak every language on earth, and has received them generously and provided all their hospitality needs, taking pride in itself without currying favor or seeking profit.

Like other Arab capitals since the seventh century A.D.,

especially Baghdad and Damascus, Jerusalem has been a city in which ancient cultures have mixed wonderfully, thus enriching the great Arab civilizational flow with their streams. This is one more of history's miracles in this part of the world: the coexistence of creeds, languages, and customs under the aegis of the Arab personality. The fact that Jerusalem is the center of the [three] Heavenly Religions has made this coexistence its greatest characteristic during the last fourteen centuries. The al-Haram al-Sharif, which is the first of the two qibla [Islamic direction for prayer] and the second of the two haram [Islamic Sanctuaries], is the first thing that attracts one's attention when approaching the city from the east. One's eyes immediately set on this shining golden dome rising high in the middle of the open spaces of the Haram: the Dome of the Rock. This rock over which the dome has been built is indeed the nucleus of Jerusalem and its heart since the most ancient times. On it or around it or because of it, kingdoms and cultures and buildings have successively arisen in which the history of the city is embodied as well as its charm: here the Canaanites built their most ancient temple, followed by the Jews, the Romans, the Byzantines, and the Arabs; even the Crusaders built an altar that lasted for a while inside the dome.

In its present wonderful shape, the Mosque of the Dome of the Rock was built by the Umayyad Caliph `Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan in 688 A.D. as he attempted to divert the Arabs of Syria and Palestine from going on pilgrimage to the Ka'ba when Ibn al-Zubayr declared himself a contending caliph in Mecca. The rock is associated with the Prophet's Mi'raj [Ascension to Heaven] and in it there is a trace of his footprint made when he alighted on it on the night of his Isra' [Nocturnal Journey], and tied his [heavenly] horse al-Buraq near it to what used to be "the Wailing Wall" of the Jews. It is also the rock on which it is said that Ibrahim al-Khalil [Abraham, the Friend (of God)] wanted to sacrifice his son Is'haq [Isaac]. Likewise, the rock falls within the area on which [King] Solomon built his

Temple. Its history, no doubt, goes back deep into the unknown periods of the mythical past.

The Dome of the Rock is the most beautiful and the most magnificent mosque in the world. It is foremost among the monuments of human civilization in architecture and splendor. Whoever wants to learn about its architectural niceties, which amaze one increasingly on close examination, should refer to what was written about them by Professor K. Creswell in his book, *Early Muslim Architecture*. Although, as with other ancient monuments, we don't know the name of its architect, there is no doubt that the Dome is one of the highest points of ancient Syrian architecture. It is curious that, one century after the mosque was built, [the Arab geographer] al-Maqdisi writes that among the reasons motivating the Umayyad caliph to spend large amounts on building the Dome of the Rock was that, on seeing Syria filled with magnificent Christian churches and witnessing the majesty of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher and its grand construction, 'Abd al-Malik was afraid that the Muslims would be overwhelmed by these buildings, so he built this monument on the Rock to resemble those churches in majesty and greatness.

In recent years, the Arab states took part in comprehensive operations of restoration that combined precision, skill, and refinement and made manifest its amazing beauty, not only in the proportions of its parts, but also in the astonishing decorative details inside and outside, including its mosaics that are possibly unequaled in beauty by any other mosaics in the world since the Byzantine period. The heavy lead layer covering the outer surface of the Dome was removed and replaced by a hard, light layer made of a metallic alloy of golden color, making it glitter and shine, as it rightly should, among the buildings of the Old City.

At some distance from the Dome of the Rock stands the Aqsa Mosque, which can take thousands of worshipers. In some of its inner details, it is an architectural masterpiece. It is

probable that al-Walid ibn `Abd al-Malik built the mosque in about 709 A.D., in most of its present shape, on the spot where the first Aqsa Mosque was built in a simple architectural style immediately after the Arabs entered Jerusalem. The Mamluks have especially left in it splendid traces of their art, witnessed by the decorations on the inside of the dome where the name of Sultan al-Nasir Muhammad was written on its inner circle in 1328 A.D.

Fortunately, visiting the al-Haram al-Sharif has been made easy for everyone in recent times and a road for cars has been paved from the Gate of Our Lady Mary that takes the visitor to the edge of the courtyard of the Haram with no difficulty.

The al-Haram al-Sharif and the Church of the Holy Sepulcher are, of course, the two primary monuments of the City. Although the Dome of the Rock, when originally built, was constructed according to the measurements of the dome of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, the latter's inner golden decorations, despite their simplicity, continue to peel off and fall. Because of the large number of Christian communities who strongly insist on their rights over different parts of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, the church's restoration was one of the thorny problems which these communities encountered more than thirty years ago.

During the British Mandate, steel props and scaffolds were put in place to support the cracked structure until the many communities could reach an agreement leading to restoration. The historic church built at the command of the Emperor Constantine in 335 A.D. on the site where it was said Christ's Cross was found, is almost suffocating today with all the new scaffolding. However, actual restoration has recently been started and, perhaps, we will see the results of the current architectural works in the coming few years.

The Church of the Holy Sepulcher comprises Golgotha and Christ's Tomb. The most impressive time for it to be seen is

during Holy Week and Easter. Prayers of the Latins, the Greeks, the Armenians, the Syriacs, and the Copts take place in it in accordance with a very ancient arrangement in the languages of the great civilizations that Palestine has known. I don't think that anyone who witnesses the rituals of Holy Saturday [of Light] performed by the Eastern communities on the day preceding Easter Sunday can later forget it as long as he lives, especially that moment in which "Light proceeds" from an aperture in the building of Christ's Tomb to be seized with candles by the thousands of worshipers and pilgrims crowded around the Tomb in what resembles the Day of Resurrection. The whole church then becomes, for a few moments, one single flame glowing with light, from the bottom floor to the roof (where people are crowded in the several tiers of balconies). At that moment, bells are rung and wooden boards are knocked in the ancient manner like bells; and choirs, who would have prepared themselves for the "circumambulation" around the Tomb, sing hymns in Greek, Arabic, Syriac, and Armenian. And in this manner, three slow and dignified processions around the Tomb are completed with chanting that may take two hours or more.

There is another procession, although somewhat less wonderful than this one, and it takes place on Palm Sunday, one week before Easter Sunday which is the day when the ancient people in Jerusalem began celebrating the return of Spring and the return of flowers and freshness to nature and man. On this day, since the beginning of Christianity, the celebration of the Christian season of pilgrimage started, passing through Passion Week (Holy Week), which included Sorrowful Friday (the Day of the Crucifixion) and ended with the Saturday of Light (Holy Saturday) and the Feast Day of the Resurrection (Easter Sunday).

I don't think that celebrating the day of Christ's resurrection at the beginning of Spring is a mere historical coincidence. For Jerusalem, indeed all of Palestine, in this

season of the year, bursts with millions of wild flowers that fill the valleys and hills, and appear as though they clothe both soil and rock equally wherever one's sight falls. Perhaps the most prominent of these flowers and the most beautiful are the red anemones which stud the earth surrounding the city on all sides and make it glow and glitter like a carpet as far as one can see. It is no wonder that anemones are, since most ancient times, the symbol of the *murdered God* and the symbol of His return to life anew, and consequently the symbol of the Holy Land.

The Christians are not, or they were not until the [1948] Catastrophe, the only people whose celebration of the Feast Day of the Resurrection coincided with the beginnings of Spring. From times in the distant past, the Muslims have [likewise in Spring] celebrated a visit to the tomb of the Prophet Moses, which is at a distance of about ten kilometers to the west of the northern edge of the Dead Sea. This celebration has always been associated with the calendar of the Eastern Churches and lasted eight days, beginning before Palm Sunday of the Eastern Christian communities and ending with Holy Friday. Over the years, the celebration of this festival has steadily grown so that the Ottomans, in the middle of last century, made it an occasion when its crowds and masses were parallel to those of the Christian pilgrims arriving in Jerusalem for Easter from all parts of the world. Thus it has become one of the most important and joyful festivals of the year. It began with the procession of the people of Nablus, on the Thursday preceding Palm Sunday, when thousands of men arrived at the gathering place outside Bab al-`Amud [Damascus Gate]. In the forenoon, the procession began to move as it entered the city from this gate while singing, chanting, and dancing. It headed toward al-Haram al-Sharif, from which it then left the city through the Gate of Our Lady Mary and went to Ra's al-`Amud, where people took cars, rode animals, or perhaps went on foot to Prophet Moses' [tomb].

The second procession was that of the people of al-Khalil



[Hebron], exciting scenes of which still cling to my memory to this day. The people of al-Khalil gathered on Saturday at Saint Elias convent, which is at a distance of four kilometers to the south of Jerusalem. In the morning of the next day, the gathering proceeded and entered the city through Bab al-Khalil [Jaffa Gate], reaching it about noon. Entering the city, the procession lasted for three or four hours that were among the most wonderful hours in the life of the city. The roads were blocked with crowds of people. Sidewalks, balconies, windows, and battlements of the Citadel swarmed with human beings. The procession was tightly pressed and thousands of men sang, cheered, and danced. Reaching Bab al-Khalil [Jaffa Gate] was the procession's climactic goal, for here the pace of moving forward became slower, giving time to groups of dancers to perform their dances, and of swordsmen to present their mock duels with big curved swords glittering above the heads of the people. I still remember, if memory does not fail me, the words which the singers repeated in the vernacular language as they swayed, rocked ecstatically, and clapped:

Al-Khalil is an adorned bride.

By its men, it is embellished.

The gathering was indeed one of men, in which vigor and courage were clearly paramount. And when one recapitulates the scenes of that wonderful and resounding procession, with its costumes, its sounds, its rhythms, and its Arab reed flute filling the air with its exciting primitive music, one can almost be sure that the festival must, no doubt, go back originally to ancient Spring rituals, as ancient as Jerusalem, reaching back to the earliest Canaanite times.

And thus, Jerusalem celebrated: the people of al-Khalil [Hebron] went to al-Haram al-Sharif and, from there, to Ra's al-'Amud like the procession of Nablus, and thence to Prophet Moses' [tomb]; then everyone returned on the following Thursday or Friday. But where are these processions today? The [1948] Catastrophe put an end to them, especially after the



Jews occupied the old entrance to Jerusalem through Bab al-Khalil [Jaffa Gate], and occupied the original road leading to it from Bethlehem and Al-Khalil [Hebron], all four kilometers of it, on May 14, 1948 upon the withdrawal of the British Army.

Since that day, coming to the city from the south was diverted eastward at Saint Elias convent, crossing the hills and valleys to the village of Sur Bahir, descending the eastern slopes of Mount al-Mukabbir, then ascending sharply toward Ra's al-Amud, thus completing by the east and indirect road a distance of eighteen kilometers, instead of the eight kilometers of the original and direct road.

Narrow lanes, arched markets into which light penetrates from regular openings in the long roofs, ascending and descending in succession following the mountainous contours of the city, flights of concrete stairs (concrete replaced the old, slippery cobblestones of pavements), curves and branch alleys in the dark of which is a sense of ancient time and a connection of today with past years, houses almost squatting on one another, and residential neighborhoods merging with markets for vegetables, others for spices, others for smith shops, and others for confectioners.

There is no nation in the world but would want to have a spot, however small, in this city. The spot may be one of those takiyya [Sufi hospices] annexed to the Haram, or it may be a convent or a church of whatever space and size. In every mosque, in every convent, there is a special universe behind the high walls, with its own atmosphere, its own language, its own dress, its own music. However unfairly Jerusalem has been treated by time, it still is the city of continuous feasts and religious rituals, to the service of which man's genius has been put to work. It is a city in constant relation with the world and, at the same time, it is a city that contemplates itself and lives its own tragedy every day. This is one of the reasons why history is alive here in every corner and why every stone speaks about

it. Stone--the father of civilizations--is prominent in the architecture of the city's buildings and markets, in all its forms and sizes; one stone going back one thousand years ago is next to one put in place today or yesterday.

You may unexpectedly see in Bab Khan al-Zayt [market] a few hundred men and women praying in Latin and kneeling in the midst of passers-by, amid the sacks and boxes of greengrocers, amid donkey drivers and pedlars, while the Qur'an reader, `Abd al-Basit `Abd al-Samad, recites verses from the Holy Book of Islam in his beautiful voice on a nearby radio set. Contradiction has melted away and wonder is gone. Along the Via Dolorosa, the memory of carrying the Cross for the sake of man echoes as people go about their business of daily life. Jerusalem is not a mere place only, it is time as well. It is a standing embodiment of man's great experience of the history of civilization, since that history began to be made, with all its achievements and tragedies.

*Jabra Ibrahim Jabra*

\* Some place-names in Jerusalem have English names which are different from their names in Arabic. Bab al-Khalil means Hebron Gate, yet its English name is Jaffa Gate. The city of Jerusalem in Arabic is called Al-Quds (Holiness) and in old Arabic texts Bayt al-Maqdis (The Abode of Holiness). Likewise some Jerusalem-related events are called by Arabic names different from those used in English, e.g., al Jum'a al Hazina (Sorrowful Friday) is called Good Friday or Holy Friday in English. (Translator)

\* Source: Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, *al-Rihla al-Thamina*, "Al-Quds: al-Zaman al-Mujassad," (Beirut/Sayda: al-Maktaba al-'Asriyya, 1968), pp. 155-176.

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# THE JOURNALS OF SARAB AFFAN

(Excerpt)

*Translated by Ghassan Nasr\**

*'The mind is its own place, and in itself  
Can make a heaven of Hell, a Hell of Heaven  
... Here at least  
We shall be free.  
John Milton*

"Somehow she had to be saved. The siege was tightening.

"Salvation comes in many kinds, and it comes, if it does, in one of several ways. Escape is one, confrontation another.

"Confrontation is all that counts. Once the thing confronted is defined, it may be faced head-on and struck.

"But when it is not defined, and like the air around us usually it is not, there is no other recourse but deceit, disguise, circumvention, no other recourse but to hit and run, to dodge, only to strike again.

"Confrontation may well require cunning, until salvation is reached, the self realized against the will of the other.

"Some are saved by trying to forget: there are those who drink to forget, others who bury their heads in the sand, on purpose, to forget.

"Some try to forget by exploiting the senses or by giving in to love, to debauchery, to prayer even, or to Valium..."

'All these thoughts went through Randa Jouzy's head as she wrote, as though she were sampling items in a store before

choosing what was suitable. For some time at the office, Randa had been pondering at least one of these thoughts each morning, or perhaps more than one, or even all at the same time, and would continue to write, as long as she felt inspired.

'And perhaps her writing, in itself, was another way of forgetting, or another form of cunning. She would sit at the typewriter and strike the keys, with no other preparation than her state of mind. During free moments, when that tyrannical chaos again crowded her brain, she would start pounding away, letting the words come as they might ...'

After I typed these lines, I paused and read them again, and said: poor Randa Jouzy, my other self, you have to bear my everyday burdens. You, Randa, are my tragic mask, my comic mask. I wonder why you don't turn against me?

I went on typing:

"From here to the furthest reaches of China, in every valley and on every mountain top, all eyes far and wide explode with darkness, misery, and desire—with oppression also, and, perhaps, with madness, passion, and self sacrifice."

Again I read what I had typed, and my fingers resumed their tapping: "Those running across plains, gliding among rocks, or crammed inside noon-time buses—all suffer from the same ordeal ..."

The word "ordeal" caught my attention. But what ordeal do I mean? It is the ordeal of being besieged, or, more precisely, of being confined, of refusing to accept, of yearning for refuge in some realm of existence where an inexplicable yet desirable freedom is to be found, whatever it may be: the freedom from present pressures and from pressures to come, from material pressures and psychological pressures—freedom, that is, from the miserable state of the world. Freedom, whatever it may be.

My fingers resumed their tapping: "There's always a death that's deferred. In this pervasive darkness, the self stumbles in its search for that glimmer that might point out an

escape to a place devoid of people, of sounds, except for the sounds of cicadas on a hot day, and, perhaps, the sudden sound of the wind on a cold evening."

I recalled a panorama from among my memories of the countryside: terraced green slopes rolling down until they vanish into foggy depths. In the sun-drenched silence the trees appear to have been created by some accident of nature. Loneliness. Even the birds have abandoned the neglected fields, and the rocks look like mythical animals petrified as they met a sudden, unexpected death in the midday heat. Randa is there. She is there alone. She does not know why she is there. How did she reach this place, and where did she come from?

My fingers tapped again at the typewriter: "But before the wind blows there is the calm, and there is the wide blue sky, the shimmering silence. Has the earth become deaf? Mute? Or is nature staging a game to amuse herself, until a volcano erupts, sending shudders through the limbs of mountain and valley? Or is nature waiting for that secret waterfall to burst from the mountain peak, its waters plunging down with a tumultuous roar to the depths of a valley black with the thick green of trees?"

I read what I had typed, still unable to keep up with the images that hovered above the pages out of my control. But I did sense the sound of the "secret" waterfall (and I wondered: "Secret? Why secret?") suddenly filling my head with sweet vertigo, and quickly I typed again:

"Ah, it is the waterfall which brought her forth among these rocks, not as a shepherdess carrying a stick and running after her wandering goats, nor as a villager in her red, blue, and yellow clothes gathering thyme and camomile leaves - but rather as a modern, city woman in blue jeans and a half-open denim shirt, wishing to avoid people, to be alone with the sounds of the waterfall, anticipating the wind before the sunset, after basking in the sun's radiance and glitter. She embraces the

radiance and glitter, gathering them in the palms of her hands and tucking them into her shirt between her breasts, feeling the warmth tickling the insides of her body. The waterfall persists in its din, until the din is everything, like silence at death, a temporary death amidst the continuous drone. The city is but a stone's throw away: the secret city, the naked city, the city from which she runs, the city which stalks her, with its congested streets, its screeching car horns trying to drown the sounds of the cicadas and of the waters plunging into the deep valley."

I stopped typing, pulled the page out of the typewriter and inserted a blank one. I fixed my gaze on the mute machine, a strange impulse filling my heart. This time, without reading what I had typed, I began a new paragraph:

"Why do I keep clinging to all this? Why do I withdraw from myself and insist on my withdrawal, my stupor? But, no, I am not really withdrawing; I am merely retreating to that unknown region inside me, not knowing whether it is what makes me want to escape, or whether it is the thing I seek in my escape but don't know how to reach. Perhaps I am running in circles, where each end is a beginning, and each beginning an end. And when work summons me, I take off like a rocket launched towards a nebula spinning with planets and meteors of which the earth knows nothing."

I laughed at the words on the page, and I typed:

"What rocket, woman? And what planets and meteors, when I am among people but seem not to be of them? I hear them and don't understand them, I talk to them and they don't understand me, and moving among them is like walking endlessly in viscous mud? How then is salvation possible? But most probably... there is no salvation. Do you hear me Randa?"

I pulled the sheet from the typewriter, and without rereading what I had typed put the two pages together in a plastic folder, tossed it aside, and went back to my work: three letters which my boss had asked me to answer, in the usual

way. He trusted my ability to shape the proper responses as he also trusted my "correct" language and my ability to express myself—even if most of the letters I wrote on behalf of my boss were similar in form and content, and rarely required special talent.

The next day I was again at the office by myself, still overwhelmed by that strange desire to explode in some unknown direction. I didn't know what to do. I found myself fixing the usual cup of coffee, sitting at my typewriter with the cup to my right, sipping from it and cherishing every drop. I slipped a blank page into the typewriter, and my fingers went on striking the keys:

"I am here once more, for the hundredth time, or the thousandth time ... The walls draw away, become remote, and the room expands, and then the walls creep together, one toward the other, crawling and drawing near, and Randa, between them, is caught like a fish in a fisherman's net. The four deaf walls close in on her finally, almost touching her: one at her right elbow and one at her left elbow, so close that she would knock her head if she had to tilt it forward or backward. But despite the small space between them, the walls are high, extremely high, rising, rising to infinity, appearing to touch the sky, which becomes a distant blue ceiling, bright and narrow, but letting in sweet breezes, and lulling, seductive voices. Do the angels sing even caged in a small sky from which there is no escape?"

I stopped typing, and sipped the rest of my coffee. A thought occurred to me which made me laugh inwardly, and I decided that it was time for Randa to leave for a while. I would speak, then, for myself, without her mask. I resumed typing:

"I wonder: what is the meaning of these tempting voices? What do the angels say in their song, having folded their wings on their ethereal bodies, on their impossible dreams? Do they say that I should fall in love, maybe? And why not fall in love? But then who should I fall in love with,



or, rather, who will make me cross the wilderness barefoot to see his face, and hear his whispers? I shall fall in love! I shall declare to myself that I have fallen into a love whose path is unknown to me! I shall say that I am in love! And if it is salvation that I am looking for, or escape, or confrontation, then this love will weaken my determination, it is as though I am running away from the one I love so that I might reach the one I love, another paradox whose essence and magic I will extricate ... Is it I among these four closed walls, reaching as high as the clouds, making up with their remoteness and loftiness for the confinement and the defeat? So be it! I will sample all the men I know—even those I know by face and name only—to find, perhaps, the one who will carry me beyond these smooth, towering walls to the Lord's promised heaven... Oh! no! no! This moving image keeps hurling faces into my hands, and I'm unable to stop it! I know these faces, one after another, but not one of them tempts me. I am not tempted by the wearily familiar. It has to be a face which I do not know, absolutely. It has to be a voice which will send a shiver through my body at the very first utterance. I must invent him! I must create from nothingness the man I love. But only nothingness can come from nothingness, unless God wills otherwise. And who am I to play God?"

Getting close to the bottom of the page, I stopped pounding out the letters, pulled the sheet out, and fed another one into the typewriter. And before the images could slip away like water through my fingers, I went on:

"Indeed, who am I? Let's see.

"Randa, my dear, allow me to remove the mask once more, if only for a while.

"I am a girl, a woman, who has turned twenty-six, spent four years pursuing a college education, who now finds her degree useless. She works in a commercial office which has nothing to do with her interests ... and what does all this matter, regarding the question of my identity? Not at all.



"Should I say that my identity is in my name? My name is Sarab Affan. And then what? My identity is that I sometimes want to explode into shrapnel, because I can no longer bear my way of life.

"My identity is that my father loves me and is afraid of me and afraid for me without understanding me. An ordinary matter no doubt. So I am just like other girls. But I know that I am different from them, and my identity is in my difference. I am honest to the point of rudeness sometimes, and innocent to the point of naivete sometimes, and I demand my rights in the spiritual and material worlds with a violence that verges on insanity sometimes. My imaginings are farther than the reach of my hands, and these imaginings dwell inside me and plague me with suffering of the spirit and body to the point of my losing control over both, sometimes. If not, then why wasn't I satisfied with Suheil Radi as a "sweetheart" during my school days, and why did I break my engagement with my cousin Wissam Affan after that—and by now wouldn't I have had a child crawling about my feet?"

I felt that the words on the page did not fully express the tumult inside my head and chest. The storm rages on, and veers away from the course of Time—and Time is needed to put the storm into words. But in its effort Time hinders my understanding of the storm. Our failure, perhaps, does not lie in Time—consisting of the succession of seconds and minutes—but in converting a mental absolute—as free-flowing as air or as scattered as flying shrapnel—converting it to words, to letters, to an aural and visual utterance that falls short of matching the absolute in its free flow. I said to myself: it is the age old paradox. I shall be satisfied with what I can capture with the words that my typewriter throws out, which, no matter how fast I proceed, yet remain hostage to Time . . . Okay. Now I'll go back.

I fed yet another page into the typewriter, once I had placed the one I had typed aside in the plastic folder. I typed:

"Therefore, oh Goddess of Imagination, help me. Torture me as you wish, but grant me what we both desire, by making us forget, or by hurling us into the flames of temptation which destroys and rebuilds, which until now has ever deceived me. Sarab Affan, from this day, from this moment on, is in love, madly in love. She will also be a courageous fighter for her homeland, for freedom. She will love humanity, heal the wounds of people everywhere. But Sarab the honest, the innocent, the quarrelsome, the vocal in demanding her share of life in the here and now, Sarab is in love, passionately in love, knowing full well that love, once it takes possession of a woman, overcomes all barriers, demolishes every barricade, acknowledges no obstacle or limitation . . . and Sarab will not settle for a lesser kind of love. It's all or nothing."

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## THE NOVELS OF JABRA AND THE ART OF TRANSLATION\*

In 1960 the British publishing house Heinemann published a new novel, called *Hunters on a Narrow Street*.<sup>1</sup> The name of the author was surely a new one to the English-reading public: Jabrā Ibrāhīm Jabrā. The novel tells the story of a Palestinian named Jamīl Farrān who, after witnessing the fighting in Jerusalem in 1948, finds himself compelled to flee his native land and to seek employment elsewhere. The city when he finds refuge is Baghdad. Much recent criticism on the novel genre has drawn attention to the close links between biography and fiction: Barthes calls biography "a novel that dare not speak its name."<sup>2</sup> Within such a critical framework, it is not surprising therefore if the hero of this novel of Jabrā should suggest certain elements of the autobiographical; the same might be said of many of Jabrā's fictional works, not least the character of Wadī` `Assāf in *al-Safīnah*. Indeed it would be more surprising if the autobiographical element were not present. However, it is not with the narrative aspects of Jabrā's novels that I am concerned in this article, but rather with the exploration of the issue of translation as a process of language usage and, on a more general level, of "carrying across" (the literal translation of the work "translation") cultural values and readers' generic expectations from one literary tradition to another.

That a writer born in Palestine should be able to write a novel in English is, to put it mildly, unusual. His achievement can be placed alongside that of another great novelist, Joseph Conrad, although the latter of course, not only mastered the English language but continued to use it as his linguistic medium for the rest of his life. To be able to write fiction in what is essentially a second language requires a kind of bilingualism which goes beyond the merely linguistic to include a virtually complete familiarity with the literary tradition of what I will term the second culture. For, while we must acknowledge that, of all the literary genres, the novel is the one that takes as its principal topic the process of change, any aspiring novelist must be thoroughly familiar with the fictional tradition into which his/her work is to fit, if only (as in the case of James Joyce, for example) in order to rebel against it. Theorists of language acquisition inform us that, even if a person is bilingual, one of the two languages involved will always be predominant at any one time, whether because of place of residence or of the perceived power of the language involved. In Jabrā's case, *Hunters on a Narrow Street* is clearly written within the framework of the English language and its literature, a consequence, no doubt, of his experiences while studying at Cambridge University from where he obtained a degree in English literature. However, what is interesting about Jabrā's novel is that, while it is written from within the literary tradition of a second language and makes use of its generic expectations, the theme of the work is set firmly within Jabrā's native culture, that of the Arab world and especially Palestine and Iraq. Even in writing an English novel, Jabrā is demonstrating his complete control over not only the literary cultures of Arabic and English but also the cultural space between them. This is an aspect of Jabrā's career to which I will return below.

In this sphere of bicultural mastery, Jabrā has also played another role of truly major importance, that of a

translator. One might say that, with the broad competence that he possesses in the two cultures of Arabic and English, there could hardly be a better person to fulfill this role. Jabrā has taken on some of the hardest projects of translation that can be imagined. At the head of the list must be placed the plays and poetry of William Shakespeare, but equal mention needs to be given to Faulkner's novel, *The Sound and the Fury*, Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, and the section of Sir James Frazer's famous work on myth, *The Golden Bough*, dealing with Tammuz and Adonis, which was to have such an impact on Arab poets in the 1950s and '60s. Among the plays of Shakespeare translated by Jabrā are *The Tempest*, *Macbeth*, *King Lear*, *Othello*, *Hamlet*, *Coriolanus* and *Twelfth Night*. He has also translated the *Sonnets*.

The work "translation" implies a process of carrying something across a border (the literal meaning of the English word); in this case, the border is both linguistic and cultural. The famous German critic, Walter Benjamin, prefaced a translation of Baudelaire's *Les fleurs du mal* with an introduction on translation, a process that he terms a "mode":

To comprehend it as a mode one must go back to the original, for that contains the law governing the translation: its translatability.<sup>3</sup>

A large theoretical literature exists on the subject, much of it devoted to the more linguistic aspects but several works also concentrating on the issues of cultural and esthetic transfer associated with the translation of works of literature. The German scholar, Wolfram Wilss, places his theory within the context of the text itself, describing translation as a process of moving a work in the "source" language into a central, interlingual space--an "intertext"--where the "intended meaning" of the original work has to be renegotiated in terms of the requirements of the "target" language and then moved

a second time into the literary environment of that second culture (including its publication and marketing practices).<sup>4</sup> It is important at this point to stress that this description is not meant to imply that there are only three stages to the translation process. Several translators who have written books on the topic make it clear that the process is a complex one; Robert Bly, for example, identifies eight different stages.<sup>5</sup> The American scholar, Eugene Nida, who has for many years been concerned with the translation of the Bible into English, prefers to concentrate on the medium and the reader rather than on the text and the translator. Using the terminology of semiotics, he describes the translation process as one whereby the symbols and referents of one language being employed in a particular medium have been transferred from one cultural environment to another.<sup>6</sup>

These theoretical investigations and others like them make clear how complex the process of translation actually is and what qualifications are needed, particularly if the work to be translated is a literary one. With that in mind, many commentators have been most discouraging: from the early Italian pun, "*traduttore traditore*" to the statement of E. Stuart Bates that

First-class translation is no work for the young;  
the sum total of the qualities requisite will usually  
take half a lifetime to acquire.<sup>7</sup>

to the well-known statement of Aḥmad Fāris al-Shidyāq:

He who has missed out on translation knows not  
what travail is;  
None but the warrior is scorched by the fire of war!  
I find a thousand notions for which there is none akin  
Amongst us, and a thousand with none appropriate,  
And a thousand terms with no equivalent.

I find disjunction for junction, though junction is  
needed,  
And terseness of style when the context calls for  
Elaboration, if the purpose is to be attained.<sup>8</sup>

And yet, beyond such pessimistic views, there are those of  
others who take a more sympathetic view; among them Eugene  
Nida:

In reply to those who insist that translation is  
impossible, one can only say that from time to  
time it is very tempting to take such a position  
seriously....Rather than being impressed by  
the impossibilities of translation, anyone who  
is involved in the realities of translation in a  
broad range of languages is impressed that  
effective interlingual communication is always  
possible, despite seemingly enormous differences  
in linguistic structures and cultural features.

Returning to the writings of Jabrā himself, we have  
already noted the extent to which he has mastered the cultural  
space that links the literary traditions of Arabic and  
English. In the realm of translation from English to Arabic, he  
gives us a particular insight into the sensitivity of his cultural  
vision and his awareness of the features of both languages in  
the Introduction to his translation of *Twelfth Night*:

I have to say at this point that I've hesitated for  
many years before undertaking to translate this  
play into Arabic, even though I've loved it since I  
was a child, have memorized much of its poetry,  
and both studied and taught it at more than one  
university. That's because I thought it was  
relatively easier and more worthwhile to translate



Shakespeare's tragedies rather than the comedies. That may be because the literary language of Arabic is more elevated and eloquent and can enliven, complicate, and dignify discourse, thus rendering it in general more receptive to the lofty burdens of anger, and grief, and the painful struggles of humanity found in the tragedies rather than to the humor, wit, and sheer sense of fun characteristic of the comedies. That is particularly so when transferring all this from a culture that is so different from our own, not merely in chronological terms, but also social and behavioral.<sup>9</sup>

When a writer and translator shows such an acute awareness of the precise cultural values attached to the linkages between subgenres of drama and the varieties of language used, one becomes aware of the extent of Jabrā's mastery of intercultural space. In this context, it is interesting to note that translation theorists emphasize one particular feature of the process: its unidirectionality. Here too, Jabrā presents an interesting case. He has translated some of his own poetry written in Arabic into English,<sup>10</sup> but he has not published in English any lengthy translations of works of Arabic literature. However, his own fictional works have been translated, and it is to the linkages between his own expertise and the process of translating two of his novels into English that I would now like to turn. In a gesture typical of Jabrā's modesty, he has in his correspondence with me consistently claimed not to have any expertise in this area, but the subtlety of his remarks on the translations of both *al-Safīnah* and *al-Baḥṭh 'an Walīd Mas'ūd* make it clear--if such clarification were needed--that the contributions that he has made to our versions of his novels in English have been crucially important additions to the process.

As if to emphasize the complexity of the translation situation when a novel by Jabrā is involved, I should begin by noting that the task has been shared by two scholars in Arabic literature working at universities in the United States, Adnan Haydar, a native of Lebanon, and myself, a native of England. The process of translation, when it involves two translators from different cultural regions, becomes yet more complicated, since each one will bring the lexicon and attitudes of his own background to the joint process of translation. In this case however, the familiarity of each translator with the literary heritage of the other made the task that much easier, and the whole enterprise was aided by a common desire to see the fiction of Jabrā made available to a Western audience. Beyond these features however, the novels that we chose to translate provided us with yet another source of assistance: they are both "novels of voices."--works of fiction with several narrators.<sup>11</sup> Many of our colleagues who have read the translation of *al-Safīnah* have been able to deduce that Adnan Haydar is the translator's voice of ʿIṣām Salmān, while I am the voice of Wadīʿ and Emilia. The English translation may perhaps been thus seen as providing the kind of linguistic differentiation between the two principal narrators that is not present in the original text.<sup>12</sup> *Al-Baḥṭh ʿan Walīd Masʿūd* provides an even richer repertoire of voices, of course, since the playing of the cassette-tape in the first chapter prompts many "characters" to reveal their own experiences with *Walīd Masʿūd*. Here too, Professor Haydar and I have subdivided the chapters while cooperating on the first "organizing" chapter, with its enormously complex passage akin to a stream of consciousness created by the playing of the tape. There is perhaps something of an analogy here between the process of translation that we have adopted and one of Jabrā's most unusual projects, the jointly authored novel, *ʿAlam bi-lā kharāʾiṭ*, that he published with ʿAbd al-raḥmān Munīf<sup>13</sup>, where, within a clearly metafictional work

that tells the story of a project to write a novel, the two novelists, Jabrā and Munīf, are able to challenge the reader to find different voices within the narrative structure. As I consider in retrospect the translations of these two novels, it is my impression that, while *al-Baḥṭh ʿan Walīd Masʿūd* posed a number of problems of great complexity in the actual process of translation, it is *al-Safīnah* which is the more problematic of the two in its translated state. I wish to emphasize here that I am considering these two novels in the context of Benjamin's term cited earlier: their translatability, and, in particular, the kind of reception that they encounter in the target cultures into which they are introduced. While Walīd Masʿūd and his son, Marwān, are continuing the struggle for the liberation of their homeland, they are doing so from a base of operations that is firmly fixed within the Arab world, its cultural values, and its literary and folkloric heritage. *Al-Safīnah*, by contrast, belongs to an earlier period in Jabrā's novelistic career and in the contemporary history of the Palestinian people. If *al-Baḥṭh ʿan Walīd Masʿūd* is concerned with the end to re-establish roots in the land, then *al-Safīnah* is a record of its loss. Wadī ʿAssāf longs to take Mahā al-Hajj back to Jerusalem. His companion, ʿIsām Salmān, has lost his land in Iraq, but because of the dictates of "tribalism." The cruise that this group of Arab intellectuals and professionals takes on the Greek boat is completely symbolic of their sense of loss and alienation, something they share with the Egyptians of Maḥfūz's *Thartharah fawq al-Nīl*.<sup>14</sup> This feeling of alienation is accentuated by the copious use of references to European culture, a general and anticipated feature of Jabra's fiction but here seen in magnified form: allusions to Christian symbolism, the music of Bach, the statues of Neapolitan churches, prolonged discussions of the fiction of Kafka and Dostoevsky, and references to small villages in Devon, an English county. While these features obviously reflect Jabrā's vast knowledge of Western and particular British

culture, they serve in a fictional context to underline the dislocation of this grouping of Arab characters brought together on the Mediterranean by what they imagine to be a coincidence but which is really no such thing.

Both *al-Safīnah* and *al-Baḥth `an Walīd Mas`ūd* contain poetry and poetic prose of great beauty. Consider the beginning of *al-Safīnah*:

The sea is a bridge to salvation--the hoary, the compassionate sea. Today it has regained its vitality. The crash of its waves is a violent rhythm for the sap that sprays the face of heaven with flowers, large lips, and arms reaching out like alluring snares.

In *al-Safīnah* however, the beauty of the language and the sea, land, buildings, events, and characters that it describes almost belongs in an intercultural space of its own, one that is completely appropriate for the group of characters who are the novel's focus and also for the time period in which the events are set. By a kind of paradox however, it is that very quality of *al-Safīnah* as a kind of cultural intertext that renders the reception of it as a translated text more complex. It will be interesting to see whether the English language readers of *al-Baḥth `an Walīd Mas`ūd*, soon to appear in English translation, form the same impression as one of its translators.

Poet, novelist, translator, critic of literature, music, and art, Jabrā, completely at home in the cultures of the Arab world and the West, seems to have provided us with a wealth of creativity and insight that one might expect from at least two lifetimes. Our gratitude to him knows no bounds. May this tribute to him, written by an English scholar [first] in Arabic, be a symbol not only of a continuing friendship but also of that process of cultural transfer that he has done so much to

foster and develop. Only thus can true international understanding be achieved.

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#### NOTES

- \* This article is an English version of a work commissioned by Faysal Darrāj and Abd al-raḥmān Munif and first published in Arabic in the Jabrā memorial volume, *Al-Qalaq wa-tajdīd al-hayāh*, Beirut: al-Mu'assasah al-'Arabiyyah li-al-dirāsāt wa-al-nashr, 1995, pp. 58-63.

1. It was translated into Arabic by Dr. Muḥammad 'Uṣfūr (Beirut: Dār al-ādāb, 1974).
2. On biography and autobiography, see *Autobiography: essays, theoretical and critical* ed. James Olney, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980; Antony Friedson, *New Directions in Autobiography*, Hawaii: University Press of Hawaii, 1981; Philippe Lejeune, *Le désir biographique*, Nanterre: University of Paris X, 1989, and *On Autobiography*, trans. Katherine Leary, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989; Andre Maurois, *Aspects of Biography* tr. S.C. Roberts, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1929; and Harold Nicholson, *The Development of English Biography*, London: Hogarth Press, 1969.
3. Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations* tr. Hannah Arendt, New York: Schocken Books, 1969.
4. Wolfram Wilss, *The Science of Translation: Problems and Methods*, Tübingen: G. Narr, 1982.
5. Robert Bly, *The Eight Stages of Translation*, Boston: Rowan Tree Press, 1983.
6. Eugene Nida, *Towards the Science of Translation*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1964.
7. E. Stuart Bates, *Intertraffic: studies in translation*, London: Jonathan Cape, 1937.
8. See Aḥmad Fāris al-Shidyāq, *Kanz al-raghā'ib fī muntakhabāt al-Jawā'ib*, Istanbul: Maṭba'at al-Jawā'ib, 1871, cited by Pierre Cachia in *An Overview of Modern Arabic Literature*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1990, pp. 35.
9. Introduction to Jabrā's Arabic translation of *Twelfth Night*. Baghdad: Dār al-Ma'mūn, 1989.
10. See, for example, his translation "Run, run, my lovely mare" ("Urkuḍī, urkuḍī, yā muhratī") in *Edebiyat*, Vol. 1 no. 2 (1976): 146-47.
11. See the articles of Diy'ā' al-Sharqāwī on *al-Safīnah*, *al-Ma'rifah* 193-4 (Mar.-Apr. 1978): 75-88.
12. This point is noted by Walīd Hamārneh in an article in *Mundus Arabicus* [Cambridge, Mass.], Vol. V (1991): 211.

13. 'Alam bi-lā kharā'iṭ, Beirut: al-Mu'assasah al-'Arabiyyah li-al dirāsāt wa-al-nashr, 1982.
14. Najīb Maḥfūz, Thartharah fawq al-Nīl, Cairo: Maktabat Miṣr, 1966; now available in an excellent English translation by Frances Liardet, *Adrift on the Nile*, New York: Doubleday, 1993.



## THE SEARCH FOR ROOTS

### JABRA AND THE BAGHDAD GROUP FOR MODERN ART

As a creative novelist, poet, art critic and painter, Jabra I. Jabra contributed abundantly to Iraqi Art. Writing in both Arabic and English, Jabra's works are considered today to be a major reference on Iraqi art. He was involved in the art movement in Iraq since the early Fifties as a painter, a founding member of the Baghdad Group of Modern Artists and as an art critic as well. In the latter role, Jabra was very creative and, most important, a unique personality. He wrote only what he believed was unique and significant to Iraqi art and artists.

Jabra's recognition as a painter has been acknowledged in many accounts; it is the purpose of this commentary to examine what I feel was Jabra's more significant contributions as an art critic and, specifically, as a critic of art in Iraq. The last time I saw paintings by Jabra was in October 1988, when a group of foreign artists and I visited his home in al-Mansour in Baghdad. There were some intriguing paintings from the Fifties, the period that witnessed the birth of the aforementioned Baghdad Group for Modern Art.

In Iraq's stormy and dramatic modern history, the Fifties prevailed as a distinctive, rich, formative period for Iraqi art. I became aware of Jabra as an art critic when I finished my art studies at the Institute of the Fine Arts in Baghdad in 1973. The Iraqi memory is still torn by the dramatic and tragic recent



events, but this has always been the place Iraq holds in history because of its place in the center of Mesopotamia's flourishing, where the earliest art forms, writing, law, and unique civilizations found their rise. The Jabra who impressed me was a man who found in Iraqi culture inspiration, love, uniqueness, and richness that had a tremendous impact on his vision and knowledge.

Those who are familiar with Jabra's writings on art can easily realize that he wrote in favor of the Baghdad Group, believing that this group, as represented by Jawad Salim, put Iraqi art "in the correct direction." Maybe these words that he used are still controversial or even biased, since there is no correct or incorrect direction in art, nor is there one single definition of art. Art as human activity is open to all changes, trends, ideas, and thus definitions. New interpretations are both possible and necessary in today's world. But Jabra's discourse on tradition and history can be understood better if we approach it within the cultural context and climate of Iraqi art of that time, specifically given the Baghdad Group's endeavors to create "a distinctive national artistic identity."

There was a particularly strong and compelling reason why Jabra wrote in favor of the Baghdad Group and why he, a founding member, believed this group above all others pointed Iraqi art in the right direction. At the time, no other group in Iraq was oriented to Iraq's past, or felt nostalgia for its history. His close ties with Salim, a fascination with Baghdad itself, and concerns for Iraq's rich cultural heritage all influenced his position.

In order to understand Jabra's critical approach, as well as that of the Baghdad Group, a review of some historical and cultural issues in Iraqi art are necessary. After a long feudal system and deep tribal traditions, Iraqi society after the World War II went through a critical period of interest in the modern age. This period observed the emergence of new social classes and the rise of the Iraqi national movement. The social changes

and political developments in the country and in the Arab world had great impact on intellectual life. Iraqi literature, art, music and theater responded to these notable changes. A strong sense of cultural relativism dominated the whole period and influenced a whole generation of writers, poets, artists and intellectuals. Although modernization in literature and art in Iraq began before the Fifties, this particular period witnessed the birth of a new intellectual as well as artistic awareness, serious literary and artistic efforts, and cultural inquiry into history and popular culture.

Art, however, was still not considered something essential to society. The young artists of that period found themselves working under hard conditions in a society that had lost its artistic traditions for some time. In other words, between A.D. 1258 until the early 19th century, there was a type of missing history in Iraq. Artistic traditions were either lost or had dried up over the centuries. These young artists of the Fifties were compelled to look toward the West where an artistic tradition remained unbroken and continued to develop, leading to the existence of Modern Art.

Iraqi artists in the late 19th century sought new artistic knowledge and techniques when a group of young Iraqi officers were sent to Turkey for military training. There they must have been exposed to European traditional artistic styles which were known in Turkey during the time. In addition, drawing was included in the Turkish military schools. One of the gifted artists of that period was Abdul Qadir Rassam (1882 - 1952) who demonstrated great technical skills in oil painting and was part of a new trend in Iraq. This illusionist style of painting already popular in the West was not known in Iraq or in the Arab world before modern times. What had been established in Iraq before the destruction of Baghdad in A.D. 1258 were fine manuscript illuminations and decorative arts such as the arabesque and calligraphy.

The second direct contact with modern Western art in

Iraq occurred during World War II and prompted some new European influences that appeared in some of the artwork of Iraqi artists of that period, such as Faiq Hassan and Jawad Salim. This contact was with Polish artists who arrived in Baghdad as war refugees. They contributed some new painting techniques to the artists of that period. Jabra (1972) appreciated these techniques, noting that "The colorful palette of some of the Polish refugee impressionists staying then in Baghdad had dazzled a few young Iraqis, and an English artist, Kenneth Wood, who did some painting in Baghdad in the midst of a group of keen youngsters, contributed to the rising enthusiasm."<sup>1</sup> What was interesting was that these Polish artists were recognized by Jawad Salim as former students of a very well-known modernist French artist, Pierre Bonnard. Iraqi art critic Mudaffar (1989) mentions that "according to Faiq Hassan, only after meeting the Polish artists did he notice that the light in Baghdad was not translucent, as he used to think, but full of dust."<sup>2</sup> Iraqi art during this period remained focused on European art styles and techniques. The period can be defined as experimental for most artists who did their best to create a new tradition and basis for art in Iraq.

### **THE SEARCH FOR A NEW STYLE**

The Baghdad Group was founded in 1951 by Salim and included nine members, of whom Jabra was one. Salim's main purpose in forming that group was to find a national style that reflects a distinctive artistic personality and a new artistic attitude opposite to the idea of universalism in art. The Baghdad Group was perhaps a reaction to the "Pioneers," another art group which was founded in 1950 by Faiq Hassan. In fact, Salim had also been a member of the latter group, but he became disenchanted with the group's direction, which was limited to outdoor painting activities. His abandonment and subsequent founding of the Baghdad Group, along with Shaker Hassan al-Said, distinguished themselves from the "Pioneers"

thusly: "The Pioneers used to go away from the city with the intention of painting and enjoying music and having fun, while our group's main concern was to look for a collective artistic identity."<sup>3</sup> The two groups represented two different attitudes. The "Pioneers" placed some significance on art as a formal approach toward reality, on formal qualities and techniques such as color line, shape, etc. But these qualities are not universal. Al-Said wonders in 1951 "should someone ask why the domes of mosques are covered with blue tiles, it is because a mosque is a symbol of the spirituality of heaven and no other color than blue can express that."<sup>4</sup> In addition, the leaders of the two groups, Hassan and Salim, had different perspectives on art. Therefore, it was impossible for the two artists to work together or to lead one group.

The Baghdad Group viewed art as something that must have a message, a particular way of looking at things. In this respect, art was a way to self-discovery. They considered art as a social and intellectual necessity that should reflect the local culture and heritage. In contrast, the "Pioneers" remained more influential than the Baghdad Group among independent Iraqi artists, art students, and the public, because this group was still captivated by landscapes, still-life portraits, and other traditional Western subjects.

In its first *Manifesto* issued in 1951, the Baghdad Group defined its position and intellectualized it through some discourse of East-West art and aesthetics. The group's key founders continued to argue that the main purpose of their group was to create a new distinctive style. Such a style cannot be achieved only by learning modern techniques from Western art. A theory or a new direction was needed to back up the group's efforts. They believed "the problem cannot be resolved simply by adopting a modern style; we have to find a way of introducing new elements into our own style."<sup>5</sup> The group's determination to break away from Western influences remained strong simply because Salim and al-Said themselves continued

to borrow Western techniques and elements. The consequence was that such elements were assimilated into their own artistic vocabulary at the same time as they interfered with the desire to break away. In its attempt to break free from the influence of European art, the Baghdad Group benefited from the poets who were trying to develop their revolutionary measures in the structure of Arabic poetry. Like the poets "we, the painters and sculptors, were also hoping to establish our own measures. And this was centered on trying to give provenance to "localism" through an artistic work of worldwide value."<sup>6</sup> The call for localism in art as a new artistic commitment remained a central goal for the Baghdad Group. As a practice, the group members, in particular Salim and al-Said, began to incorporate and borrow elements and statements from Iraqi culture and from Mesopotamian and Arab-Islamic artistic traditions.

### **JABRA'S EARLY EXPERIENCE WITH THE BAGHDAD GROUP**

The Baghdad Group members had close ties with writers, poets, and other distinguished intellectuals of the Fifties. The group members, in particular, al-Said and Jabra, participated in the debates on literature and art that took place in Baghdad coffee shops. One of the interesting cultural phenomena of this period was the emergence of the literary coffee shops in Baghdad, two of which were the Yassin Coffee Shop and Brazilia Coffee Shop." The simple coffee shop was a kind of school for us in which we developed our ideas and persuasion and plans. It also became a sort of starting point which witnessed the launching of many of our adventures. A number of great poems by Buland al-Haidari, Hussein Mardan, Kadhim Jawad, and later, Badr Shakir al-Sayyab, saw the light for the first time in Yassin Coffee Shop."<sup>7</sup> During this period, a special close tie brought together the young Jawad Salim and Jabra, who were in their late twenties, and Shakir Hassan al-Said, who was in his mid-twenties. Al-Said states that it was

poet Buland al-Haidri who introduced him to Jabra in 1949 for the first time. Al-Said adds that Jabra, who had graduated recently from Cambridge University, demonstrated a great knowledge of English literature and European cultures. For this reason, Jabra received special recognition and appreciation in Iraqi intellectual circles in Baghdad. Jabra's experience in Baghdad was very significant and necessary, especially in his formative years where he polished his knowledge about his own culture and history. It was obvious that, with such a unique intellectual background, he would play a significant role in Iraqi art through the Baghdad Group.

In an interview with Elyas al-Kouhry published in Jabra's book, *Yanabi' al-Ru'ya* (Fountains of Vision), Jabra talked about his early experience as a painter and founding member of the Baghdad Group:

When I went to Baghdad in 1948, I met with Jawad Salim a year later after his return from England, because each of us wanted to achieve the same thing in his own way. Just after that, we founded the Baghdad Group for Modern Art. We set up our first exhibition in April of 1951. There I exhibited seven paintings. I remember that Jawad Salim insisted that they must all seven be exhibited in spite of the initial objection that they were Palestinian paintings and had nothing to do with Baghdad. He said that all these paintings belonged to the Arab movement. Now, this was important because painting was a basic factor in my thinking about the issues of modernization. Such was my role with Jawad Salim and others in Iraqi art. You know how much I was interested in Iraqi art up till then, because I found in it another medium for renewing the Arab vision, just as had been the case with poetry.<sup>8</sup>

In providing historical data, Jabra played significant roles in documenting the group's events and activities. He presented reliable information about the group's exhibitions as well as documents and biographies, etc. He preserved other valuable information about other artists and art groups, all of which is still integral to reflecting on the development of Iraqi art.

### **NEW ARTISTIC PERSPECTIVE**

The group set up its first exhibition in 1951 at the Museum of Costumes in Baghdad, where Jawad Salim delivered a speech at the opening reception. In it, he criticized the public and critics who attempted to impose their tastes and biases on artists. The group, from the beginning, did not yield to the public and commercial galleries' demands for cheap art, because this would create false traditions and mislead the public itself. In this respect, the group attempted to enhance art education by engaging the public in their activities. In addition, the group's first *Manifesto* was read by Shaker Hassan al-Said. This was one of the most significant artistic documents in Iraq in the Fifties. It addressed new artistic concerns in Iraqi art that had heretofore never been never addressed. The document placed a great importance on the historical and cultural context in which art is produced, and called for self-realization. The group argued that such self-realization would be impossible without new appreciation and inquiry into the artistic tradition. The problem of art couldn't be achieved by borrowing or adopting some modern techniques alone, but artists needed to find their own visual vocabulary :

We, standing at the crossroads, have to decide what are the elements of our civilization which we should integrate in our current work. In other words, we have to combine our experience of Western art with our local, or *genius loci*. For it is this 'genius,' of which most of us are completely



ignorant today, which will transcend those other values currently prevalent in the world. Therefore we proclaim today the birth of a new school of painting which stems from the roots of our civilization, with all its beliefs and fashions, and our unique ethos of the East. We shall reconstruct what has collapsed since the thirteenth century, the al-Wasiti or ar-Rafidain school; we shall reforge the links in the chain, broken when Baghdad fell into the hands of the Mongols, for the benefit of our people and the peoples of the world.<sup>9</sup>

The first exhibition was an opportunity for the group to demonstrate its perspective as well as its objectives for the public. It came about at a time when the public was still unaware of contemporary art. Thus, the group was criticized by some people, receiving negative or mixed reviews from local newspaper critics. Confirmed by both Jabra and al-Said, Salim mentioned in his presentation that some writers called him and his group "the enemies of the people." However, it was not only in Iraq but also in many other cultures that the response to new art forms might be less than positive. Realizing that Iraqi society at this time was still suffering from illiteracy, it is remarkable that the group gained success despite such a negative initial reaction. This was corroborated by Jabra, who considered the the group's exhibitions were successful in that they drew public and media attention:

Exhibitions came in rapid succession; the air buzzed with arguments about the artists' intent among the painters and sculptors themselves, among members of the public—mostly young intellectuals and university students and in the newspapers." Fortunately, a number of artists were quite articulate, whether as speakers or writers;



their case was put across in manifestos, in public meetings and in lengthy, often heated articles.<sup>10</sup>

### **JABRA AND THE QUESTION OF ARTISTIC ROOTS**

The revival of the old artistic traditions remained a central issue in Jabra's critical approach. He deeply believed that in order for Iraqi or Arab artists in general to achieve distinctive identity, they should look at their history and culture. Also Jabra was aware that the misuse and misinterpretation of tradition could be destructive too. However, in his writing Jabra didn't address the issue of tradition in relation to aesthetics and art in the contemporary age. It was not enough to make the claim of the necessity of tradition to contemporary artists without providing a logical reason or argument.

During my stay in Japan from 1898-1991. I realized that Japan enjoys a very unique and old tradition. But the Japanese artists who also concerned about their culture and history didn't look at the past in the same way that pioneering Arab artists. In other words, their art features very interesting post-modern characteristics at the same times one may find in their art visible Japanese sensibilities, characteristics mixed up and assimilated with some Western elements and influence. In his book, *The Grass Roots of Iraqi Art*, published in 1983, Jabra writes:

One of the facts that has always to be recognized in understanding Arab art today is that however revolutionary Arab artists may be in concept and in inspiration, a spirit of tradition hangs on to them which they cannot, will not, shake off. However, much as they may subscribe to the view of 'internationalism' or 'cosmopolitanism' in modern art, they will not give up the idea that their identity can only be shaped by rooting themselves in a

tradition of their own, which helps to give a distinction to their work, marking them off as the creators and extenders of the national culture.<sup>11</sup>

In this book, Jabra also viewed the whole contemporary experience of Iraqi art through the eyes of the Baghdad Group's perspective on tradition. Jabra reviews the works of more than thirty Iraqi artists, arguing that all these Iraqi artists were rooted in their traditional arts. Some important influential Iraqi artists such as Mohammed Maherdin (and others) were not included simply because these artists were not interested in traditional art. Jabra was criticized for trying to follow a particular bias in his interpretation of Iraqi art. In her critique of Jabra's book, Ali (1985) rejects Jabra's view as being one-sided critical method because it failed to address major issues in Iraqi art. This writer argued that Jabra put emphasis on tradition to promote a distinctive identity, focusing only on ancient Sumerian, Assyrian, and Islamic influences on contemporary art while ignoring other influences and characteristics.<sup>12</sup>

I think that Ali was correct in her critique of Jabra because tradition is not the only source of influences for contemporary artists. It is but one among many other important sources and possibilities. Perhaps Jabra may have neglected other artistic trends in Iraq that took root from different philosophical positions from those of the Baghdad Group, but it is important to note that through his emphasis on attaching great significance to the cultural or historical context of Iraqi art, he managed to introduce a bold, new topic into Iraqi art criticism. This also meant that Jabra did not attend to Iraqi art in the 1980s, one of the most critical periods in modern history in Iraq. The Iraq-Iran war catastrophe and other national and international events must have had some impact on Iraqi artists' experience. New generations of Iraqi artists are not necessarily viewing new realities through the Baghdad Group's approach. They have their own vision and direction, too. The significance



Jawad Salim, *Man and Earth*, 1955.

of Iraqi art is that each generation has tried and competed with each other to bring out their best works, creating art forms that respond to the historical moment, to new political and social realities. Many Iraqi artists incorporated new themes and elements from their own reality and from Arab modern history, such as the Algerian struggle, the Palestinian cause, democracy problems in the Arab world, as well as world events, simply because they have been so influenced by such events and find it impossible to isolate themselves from what is going on in the rest of the world.

## JABRA AND JAWAD SALIM

Jawad Salim was born in 1921 and is considered by critics to be the spiritual father of Iraqi contemporary art. There was a special relationship between Salim and Jabra that continued until Salim's death in 1961. To Jabra, Salim was a legendary artist, a mythical figure who inspired a whole generation of Iraqi artists. No other writer wrote as much about Salim as Jabra. In his introduction to *Iraqi Contemporary Art*, he credited Salim for his outstanding role in the Iraqi art movement, hence solidifying the importance of Salim's painting theories and works, declaring that "his appearance at the inception of a movement of innovation in the artistic vision in Baghdad brought about a leap forward in Iraqi art in the correct direction; without him it would have been delayed for at least another generation."<sup>13</sup> In a compelling book, *Jawad Salim wa Nush al-Hurriya* (Jawad Salim and the Freedom Monument, 1974), Jabra offered lively descriptions and interpretations of Salim's life, works, and contributions to contemporary Iraqi art. He also related comments from the artist on art, literature, and personal matters. The book included some important brief details on each unit of this huge monument, asserting that the Freedom Monument "was the largest monument an Iraqi artist made in the last 2,500 years."<sup>14</sup>

When writing about Salim or al-Said, Jabra tried to find connections between their works and those of other Iraqi artists such as Yehya al-Wasiti (A.D. 1237), who illustrated the *Maqamat of al-Hariri*. This collection of folk tales was written in the early Twelfth century about the exciting adventures of the hero Abu Zayd. The importance of al-Wasiti lays in his artistic ability to explore the social events of his time in very impressive visual terms. Grabar (1974) states that "al-Wasiti sought to transfer into visual terms a perfectly valid psychological or intellectual interpretation of the Hariri text."<sup>15</sup> He added his own visual personal interpretation and provided a very realistic outlook on Baghdad life in the thirteenth century,

as al-Wasiti did. Local culture and daily life in the city of Baghdad attracted Salim's attention. Jabra (1981) observes that the artist was influenced by the local heritage. He recognized that:

perhaps more than any other artist, Jawad Salim made his contemporaries aware of the issues of style and tradition. In spite of his immense knowledge of the history of painting and sculpture, Salim preserved an innocence, a freshness of vision, which made him draw on local forms, symbols, habits, superstitions - all the folklore still very active in the alleys and coffee shops of Baghdad and the surrounding countryside."<sup>16</sup>

The group fascination with al-Wasiti remained nostalgic. According to Jabra, Salim accidentally saw for the first time al-Wasiti works in a book at the house of his friend, the Iraqi artist Ata Sabri in 1941. His fascination continued for his whole life. Jabra points out that Salim wrote with anger a letter to one of his friends who claimed that Iraq is colorless. He replied:

My brother, life is full of color. Even in the mud of our street there are millions of colors. Look at Yahia al-Wasiti, one of the greatest artists who has appeared in Iraq. The Iraq which you claimed is colorless is the country of palm trees. He immortalized Iraq with his features and colors. (Do you remember his picture) from the *Maqamat of al-Hariri*? It is a picture featuring a group of camels. You know very well the camels of Iraq; their color is no more than the color of dust. This great genius has portrayed each camel in a color that blended with color of the camel next to it."<sup>17</sup>

Besides local influences on al-Said and Salim both were influenced by Western art as well. Both artists borrowed from European artists such as Matisse, Klee, Moore and Picasso.

In both modern and contemporary art movements, there have been much evidence emerging of the interaction between international art movements, trends and artists, As we know,



Jawad Salim, *A horse. A study for the Freedom Monument*, 1959

modern Western art benefited from the artistic tradition and cultures of Asia and Africa and the Middle East. European artists such as Klee and Matisse, who visited north Africa in the early 20th century, were attracted to Arab-Islamic artistic traditions. Regardless of the adoption by Matisse and Klee of these elements, both artists maintained their Western character. Similarly, Jawad Salim, as well as al-Said, did not lose their Eastern character.



Jawad Salim, A street in New York, 1954



## SUMMARY

The discourse of the Baghdad Group in art reflects some mixed views at best, and perhaps some outright contradictions. One may find a strong conflict in al-Said and Jabra's writings where there were always two conditioning forces facing each other: modernity and tradition. Jabra viewed modernity as a Western approach and exhorted Arab artists to be aware of their roots. Although Jabra recognized the necessity for Western artistic influences, his stance against universalism seems arbitrary rather than natural. It is true that this product of Western Modernism holds a condescending attitude over popular culture and crafts, favoring high art, and especially Western products. Such an ideology may indeed represent a threat to indigenous cultures, as was evidenced by the French colonial presence in Algeria in the nineteenth century. Values and practices that Westerners themselves have renounced continued to live in Arab culture, becoming a part of this culture, such as the distinction between high art and folk art, a distinction that never existed in Arab culture before colonialism.

Well-known Iraqi poet Buland al-Haidari (1981) provides an example of how local folk art was overwhelmed by these imported values. He points out that the Moroccan Association of Decorative Art is prejudiced against folk art, and further contends that the idea of folkloric art being unprogressive is an ideal maintained by imperialism, and that any works ignoring folklore excel parochial frameworks. This relegates folk art as being inadequate and disdainful of the modern age.

Iraqi artists, especially those of the Baghdad Group, argued that folk arts as well as the ancient arts of Mesopotamia and Arab-Islamic arts are important for Iraqi contemporary art. The borrowed traditional elements, motifs such as Arabic characters, arabesque, graphite and even three-dimensional techniques from ancient Assyria and Sumerian arts. Their use of the Arabic script was an attempt to find a basic character in



art. These Arabic letters are not universal. The use of tradition, however, sometimes caused problems that have not yet been resolved. Many of these elements of the past have little or no significance today, and their use can be destructive or become mere imitation, holding no value for contemporary art. Lebanese critic, Samir Sayegh, argues that Arab artists have, to date, "failed to interrupt satisfactorily the Eastern character in a way that would give him the connection with and pride in his identity."<sup>18</sup> He adds that creativity in art requires "a special creative imagination" and regards the use of past traditions as artificial." It is for that reason that one could interpret the artistic trends that claim to be a revival of the old artistic heritage as trends which are more reactions than inner, positive beliefs. One can even go further and state that they are simply utterances relating to the political, national and social struggle that the East faced with colonialists."<sup>19</sup>

One may add that artists, whether they are Arab or non-Arab, are required to take an active role in the contemporary age, and that this perhaps demands a new interpretation as well as a new definition of art. Whether or not the Baghdad Group endeavored toward the revival of the old artistic tradition is significant to Iraqi and Arab contemporary knowledge, yet their view, however, valid as it was at the time, cannot be viewed as the only possible direction for Iraqi artists to use now to promote a desired distinctive cultural character. It remains one of several approaches Iraqi artists may use to define their contemporary identity. Contemporary Arab art, in its diversity and structure, must never stand alone; it must always have both internal and external influences for it to exist as contemporary art. Cultures must encounter each other, look at each other's elements and characteristics, each other's unique perspective and ways of seeing. We cannot fall into the trap of believing in wrong or correct perspectives or deciding that some cultural values are better than others. Both must be viewed and appreciated within their cultural and historical

context. Arts, like cultures, are patterned and diverse, and for this reason, cultural interaction and dialogue remain as human necessities.

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## **`AMMO JABRA**

My memories of `Ammo Jabra go a long way through the span of my life—when I was less than four years old. One day, I heard my father saying to my mother that soon, Jabra would come to spend the summer vacation with us, here in Bethlehem, to study and prepare for his scholastic exams. Soon enough, `Ammo Jabra arrived. I vividly remember myself standing at the top of the stairs looking down at a young man carrying a bag in one hand and other things in the other. As he reached the top of the stairs, he laid his luggage down and bent down to hug and kiss me, saying that I was growing to be a pretty girl, and added that he had brought with him a notebook and colored pencils for me. I was overwhelmed by `Ammo's compliments and the book and pencils which he pulled out from a school bag to give me. Right away, I sat on the floor with a red pencil in my hands and tried to draw something on the notebook, but did not know what, or how. He must have noticed my perplexity for he came back and said, "Let me show you how to hold a pencil." He then drew some lines which to me looked like flying birds. He encouraged me to try and copy what he drew and said that I could draw anything I wanted. I remember how I tried to hold the pencil right, and went on scribbling and enjoying its charm.

I recall `Ammo Jabra spending most of the day on the roof of our house, and when my mother took me with her to hang the washing on the roof, I used to see him, sitting on a blanket, reading and writing, surrounded by books. I remember him saying to my mother the sceneries surrounding Bethlehem were both beautiful and natural. I also remember hearing my mother say "God keep this young man who never tires of reading and writing. See the neighbors admire him and enjoy conversing with him, and hearing his tales."

Whenever `Ammo noticed me playing with my rag doll—made by my mother—or trying to draw with my pencil, he would stop by me to say warm and encouraging words—something I was not used to from the family, or the surrounding neighbors, for children in those days were hardly noticed, let alone encouraged! I still remember the stories he used to tell me about St. George, the roman soldier, the dragon, and the beautiful princess, and about other legendary heroes. Oh how I enjoyed listening to those tales, and felt proud of `Ammo who knew so much!

Time elapsed very fast and the summer vacation came to an end. My uncle returned to his home in Jerusalem and I missed him very much. But soon after, my father announced that we were moving to Jerusalem, where job opportunities were far better than in Bethlehem; furthermore, we would live near my father's family.

When we went to live in Jerusalem, `Ammo Jabra would often come visit us during the weekends when he was off from the Arab College in Jerusalem (Al- Kulliyah Al-Arabiyyah). His visits always brought activity, conversation, and laughter to our lives. Most of the neighbors would come visit us to greet and talk to him. I noticed that he was the speaker at such gatherings, always narrating stories about people who had peculiar names and lived in faraway lands. I would sit there, among the rest of the guests, and listen with pleasure and awe. Very often he would be asked to join the neighbors in the frontyard, to eat

nuts and drink coffee, tell tales, or read poetry. Sometimes, I would hear him talk of dreams, thoughts, and behavior, and even though I did not comprehend his words, I enjoyed listening to his voice, special to me and to the neighbors, just like his language and gestures were. Not for any reason would I miss being where `Ammo Jabra was, to listen to what he had to say. He always had a word of praise for me and would say that it was now my turn to tell the stories. I was too shy to tell him that I was my friends' storyteller.

Sometime later my uncle Yusif told us that Jabra was granted a scholarship to study in England. At that time I didn't fully understand what that meant, but I knew that it had to be something "good". Dozens of `Ammo's friends and admirers, most of whom were of a young age, gathered in my grandfather's house on the farewell day. The house turned into an apiary and everybody was talking mirthfully. The next day, my father woke me up bright and early to ask me if I would join the family at the train station to bid `Ammo Jabra farewell. I was very much pleased to accompany all the members of the family. Upon our arrival at the train station, I saw many of `Ammo's friends lined up, each waiting to bid him farewell. I saw many moist, glistened eyes, all wishing my dear uncle the best of luck and a safe return. I sobbed at his departure and knew that I was going to miss my uncle and my teacher for a long time.

Later, my uncle Yusif was incessantly talking of the many pictures and long letters my uncle kept flooding us with from England. All my family would sit round my uncle Yusif and listen to him read the beautiful letters about `Ammo's achievements, his visits to various parts of England, his friends, and his life at the college. Accompanying most letters, were pictures of the places he'd seen. I enjoyed listening to his letters and used to promise myself to visit all the beautiful places my uncle described.

Time flew by swiftly and `Ammo was coming home.

Every member of the family was busily preoccupied with the preparations for his arrival. Again, relatives and friends and neighbors flocked in huge numbers to greet my uncle the day of his arrival. Amongst all the dancing and singing, I was overcome with an unsurpassable joy, especially when asked by my grandmother to help serve the *maza* and other foods.

From that day on, I observed many changes around the house. New shelves were added the existent ones, and soon they were all filled with books. The walls now bore oil paintings, and a new gramophone, accompanied by many records, was shipped from England. Different types and sizes of smoking pipes adorned the coffee table along with several English and Arabic newspapers. I was thrilled by all the wonderful changes occurring in my grandfather's house, and enjoyed most of the influx of new guests who were known by the family as Jabra's guests.

One day, `Ammo asked me how I was doing in school and what books I was reading. Shyly but fervently, I dashed to our apartment on the upper floor, and fetched my schoolbag to show `Ammo. With examining eyes, he noticed the "A" grades that adorned most of my test papers and said, "I'm so proud of you, and want you to start reading some of my books on the shelves." Right away, he introduced me to works of well known novelists such as Jane Austen, Emily and Charlotte Brontë, George Elliot and many others. He spoke in such a fervent way of these persons that I was inclined to believe that they were all his personal friends from England. He then directed my attention to all the big art books on the shelves, especially the ones concerning the Renaissance, which he explained in his special narrative method. He stressed that I would find great pleasure in his books. Sure enough, I learned a great deal from `Ammo's library and knew of the pleasure he always talked about—but, alas, I never thought of expressing my heartfelt gratitude to my greatest teacher.

All the times spent with my uncle are dear to my heart.

Several visits, however, stood above the rest. I especially enjoyed the visits during which his students from Al-Rashidiyya College would come to the house to listen to classical music and look at `Ammo's art books. I would sit among them and listen to my uncle's explanations of the music.

Daily, `Ammo Jabra would visit the Fine Arts Club at the Y.M.C.A. Afterwards, he would stop by our house to converse with my mother and the neighbors on various subjects. Even though my mother was illiterate, she greatly enjoyed the conversations which she called "sweet and charming."

Sometime later, I came to know that `Ammo was moving to Katamoun in Jerusalem with my widowed grandmother. Again, I felt that I was suffering a great loss.

In December 1947, the Samiramis Hotel in Katamoun was bombarded by Jewish terrorists; my uncle's house, located near the hotel, was affected by the force of the explosion. According to my father's advice, my uncle, my grandmother, as well as the rest of the family, 'temporarily' moved to Bethlehem waiting for the palestinian plight to be solved. So with thousands of others refugees, we fled to Bethlehem hanging on to our lives. Despite all the terror and horror that burdened our souls, `Ammo managed to transform the tragedy into an act of helping people. He would give lessons to students preparing for their scholastic exams, infusing into their blood hope and merriment. He would meet his friends and talk of art, society, and politics. Gradually, a new trend of interest in arts and literature fueled into Bethlehem. All were opening their doors for the wise and respected *ustaz* Jabra to lecture and talk so wisely. This short era remains in all our hearts because it proved our need to fight the battle with knowledge and wisdom—which `Ammo Jabra so graciously taught us.

I will never forget the long morning walks I used to take in the companionship of my uncle and his many friends. We would walk over the hills and planes of Bethlehem which



my uncle adored and so poetically described. Thanks to these walks, I learned how valuable the beauty of nature is to our physical and mental health. In addition to these memorable morning walks, we also had beautiful evening strolls to Deheishe where we would all stop at our house there and drink refreshing water from our well after watching the sun set. After a much refreshing drink, my uncle would talk of things new to our souls, such as surrealism, impressionism, romanticism, and new philosophical ideas. These talks were unforgettable for they were told with such ease and knowledge by 'Ammo Jabra, the leader and teacher of the group.

The cycle of time was turning and soon enough we were bidding my uncle farewell again. He was going to Baghdad to teach English in one of the schools there. After his departure, all walks, lectures and cultural gatherings ceased to exist for they could only happen if my uncle were there. I missed him more acutely this time. But there was a spark of hope for all the family as 'Ammo Jabra promised to visit during his summer vacation.

Conditions worsened politically and the unoccupied areas soon enough became the West Bank of Jordan. My uncle faithfully came to visit us every summer with his new family, and we would visit him often in Baghdad and stayed with his loving, hospitable wife Lami'a (God bless her soul).

Life continued and the economic and political conditions kept changing. I moved to Saudi Arabia but my uncle's books were still sent to me by my late father (God bless his soul). The family kept in touch through mail. In 1980, I moved with my husband to the United States. The last time I had the opportunity of meeting with my uncle was in 1990, when he gave a speech at the Arab Bank Education Centre in Amman. In mid 1994, I phoned him when I heard that he had been hospitalized. He soon recovered though and invited me to visit him in 1995.

Near the end of 1994, a dear friend called and in a deep

and strangled voice tried to tell me of 'Ammo's fate. I knew what she was going to say even before she pronounced the horrible word. My uncle Jabra, my hero, had left our world. I simply couldn't understand why, or how. After all, heroes don't die. But he hasn't died, for he is still living, in our minds and hearts, and the treasure of his works still remains, as an invisible light, to guide future generations.

*Julia Murad Jabra*



## SUFISM, CREATIVITY AND EXILE

An interview with  
SEYYED HOSSEIN NASR\*

*Suppose I am a Westerner. I hear people around me talking about Sufism and I am curious. I want to know about it, and I come to you and I ask : What is Sufism?*

Sufism is a path which leads us to God, the highest meaning of the term God being both the personal God and Ultimate Reality. And since all authentic spiritual paths must be within the world created by Revelation of the manifestation of the Divine through the Logos, it must be within an orthodox framework of religion. Sufism is such a path within Islam.

*So you think that Sufism has its own Islamic grass-roots?*

Absolutely. Sufism is based on three elements. First of all, it is based on the truth that is contained within the Noble Qur'an, the inner dimension of the Qur'ân, the inner meaning of the Qur'ân, the *haqîqah* (truth) that is contained within the Qur'ân, which comes from God. The second element is the example of the blessed Prophet Muḥammad and the virtues which were perfected within the being of the Prophet, owing to the fact that he was the last Prophet of God, the perfect model to be followed by all Muslims. The third element is the spiritual influence which is called *al-barakah al-*

*muḥamadiyyah* (The Muhhmmadan grace). It is a very distinctive spiritual influence which is like the energy which makes possible for a lamp to light, which makes possible in fact, the very practice of Sufism. All of these three elements spring directly from the Islamic Revelation. They are the foundations of Sufism.

*Here, I think of the great Persian Sufis, such as Suhrawardi, Attâr, Hâfiz, Haydar Amoli... And I think mainly of Corbin's interpretation of Suhrawardi. I am referring here specifically to his astonishing work The Man of Light in Iranian Sufism, where he shows that Suhrawardi made an extraordinary synthesis between Zoroastrianism as an old religion of Persia and Neo-Platonism. As for the Hadîth and the Qur'ân, it seems to be only in the background. Do you think that Corbin went too far in his interpretation of Suhrawardi?*

Corbin and I were friends for many, many years. We were close collaborators. We taught seminars together on Islamic philosophy and Sufism at Tehran University for twenty years. He wrote some of the most brilliant books on Sufism, and I have a lot of respect for his work. As for his interpretation of the synthesis done by Suhrawardi, it does not negate at all what I am saying about the origin of Sufism at all! Because you must understand that this synthesis carried out by a person like Suhrawardi and many other people like him has for its basis specifically Islamic teachings. Pre-Islamic teachings chosen by Suhrawardi do not invalidate the Qur'anic doctrines. The Qur'ân in fact provides the very power that makes this synthesis possible.

The knowledge that made possible such a synthesis and which enabled Suhrawardi to carry out such a path is Islamic gnosis or *ma`rifah*, Islamic divine knowledge which comes precisely from the Qur'ân and the *Hadîth*. It may at first

appear that Qur'ân and *Hadîth* are only at the background, as you mention. But it is not the background. The exterior form of the Qur'ân and the *Hadîth* is the point of departure, you might say, for the penetration into the inner meaning of the sacred text and the teachings of the Prophet, peace be upon Him. But that inner meaning itself does not imply that the outer meaning was redundant and is irrelevant. The inward cannot be reached except by means of the outward.

Why is it that Suhrawardi did not come into bringing another civilization? We have a similar situation in the Christian civilization, with Saint Augustine. Why is it that Saint Augustine read Plato and integrated Plato into the Christian perspective? It is by virtue of the possibilities inherent within the Christian tradition that Saint-Augustine was enabled to do so. He did not become less Christian by doing so...

There is also another point which is absolutely essential : Islam is the last plenary revelation of our human history. Therefore, through this finality, Islam contains a very great power of synthesis and it considers the truth not to be unique to itself, in contrast to many other religions. Even the word *Islam* does not begin with the Qur'ân. The Prophet Abraham is called Muslim by the followers of the Qur'ânic revelation. Yet he lived thousands of years before the advent of the Qur'ânic revelation, in the year 610 when the first *sûrah* was revealed to the Prophet Muḥammad by the Archangel Gabriel in Makkah.

Because of this synthesis, Islam sees everything which confirms its doctrine of Unity, of *tawḥîd* as being Islamic in the deepest sense. Now precisely, because Sufism is that aspect of Islam which deals with the most universal and the most inward—because the inward and the universal go together rather than with the outer and the particular—the synthesizing power of Islam is manifested mostly in Sufism.

In India, Sufism encountered Hinduism and a certain form of Buddhism. In Syria, it encountered Christian

spirituality. In Persia, it encountered Zoroastrian doctrines and Manichaeism. Sufis did not look at the inner meanings of these religions as anti-Islamic. They tried to see what they were in essence. They never adopted elements which were against the Islamic point of view. Suhrawardi himself is very clear on this issue, when he said that he was against dualism *thanawiyyah*; and when he praised the ancient wisdom of the Persians, he was talking about the sages among the Persians who were among the *mûwahhidûn*, who were *unitarians*. The Sufis did not accept elements which were against the Islamic perspective, such as outward polytheism, or dualism as in the case of the classical interpretation of Zoroastrianism. But when they met doctrines or languages or in particular symbolism which was in accordance with the perspective of Islam, which the Sufis tried to realize at the highest level, they integrated these elements, which must not be confused with turning their backs upon the Qur'ân.

*I agree with you. But while I, like you, understand Suhrawardi from this perspective, I think that Corbin focused on the fact that Suhrawardi wanted to revive the pre-Islamic heritage of Persia..*

This is a very specific issue to which you are alluding . Corbin was not a Sufi, although he had a great love for Sufism. Corbin had a kind of existential "participation" in the Islamic universe. Let me put it this way: He was very close to the Shî'ah point of view, even though he was not practicing Shî'ism. His participation was mostly intellectual, and of a high order.

What Corbin was interested in the specific work that you are mentioning, and in other books as well, is the resuscitation of Persian myths and metaphysical and philosophical doctrines in the Islamic period, and there is something profound , no doubt in this search! Louis Massignon, the teacher of Corbin,

once said that "Islam was the mirror in which Iran contemplated many of its ancient myths."

In fact, it was by virtue of the esoteric dimension of Islam that Islamic Persia was able to integrate its past into its culture. Had there been only the externalized forms of Islam, such an integration would not have been possible! But this integration did not negate the external elements of Islam. Suhrawardi lived at a time when Islam had spread all over Persia, and he practiced Islam when he went to the mosque and when he prayed as the Persians still do so 800 years after him.

*I want to come back to this fascinating issue: Islam as a synthesis. It seems to me that Suhrawardi did his own creative synthesis. He integrated Neo-Platonism into Zoroastrianism—without accepting the dualism of the latter—and enveloped the whole integration within the Islamic tradition. He made the theme of Light the center of his work. With him, Light is not in battle with the darkness as in classical Zoroastrianism. God is Light as the Qur'ân tells us.*

That is right. The Qur'ân says: "God is the light of heavens and the earth." Suhrawardi refers to God as *nûr al-anwâr* (the Light of lights). What Suhrawardi did was to adopt the language of Mazdean angelology and synthesize it with the theses of Neo-Platonism. He created a metaphysical language based on the symbolism of Light in a very powerful way and there is no doubt that he was a great genius.

But you must understand that both Neo-Platonism and elements of the Mazdean and Zoroastrian tradition which he adopts for his doctrine are all metaphysical languages and must not be confused with the experiential aspect of the world of the Spirit which is made possible for him by Islamic esoterism. We must not forget that Sufism is based on a way of experiencing the Divine. All Sufi doctrine is a language erected to describe the path leading to that experience and contains signposts on the



path of direct knowledge. The intellection that accompanies leads to divine knowledge, because Islam is a way of sapiential realization. Islam is a religion of knowledge and also possesses a gnostic form of mysticism, and I mean "mysticism" in its authentic sense. Islamic mysticism or Sufism is essentially a sapiential one. Therefore, the language used to describe its inner truth can be drawn from other metaphysical systems which are cogent and pertinent as long as they possess the appropriate language. For Western civilization, the intellectual language of mysticism was essentially provided by Platonism and Neo-Platonism. The deepest mystical Christian writings, such as the *Celestial Hierarchies* of Dionysius are all impregnated by a language drawn from Platonism and Neo-Platonism.

In studying Platonism and Neo-Platonism, modern scholarship often confuses the language with the reality. There was a language that was used by Islam as well as Christianity, whose mysticism is however based more on love than knowledge, for a spiritual reality which comes from the origin of the religion in question. This is exactly the case with Islam, except that Islam had more access to diverse languages than Christianity, because Islam not only inherited the metaphysical teachings of the Greco-Alexandrian Antiquity as we see in Christian civilization, but also the Persian and sometimes the eastern traditions, such as those of India, about which the West had heard little until modern times.

*You speak of Sufism integrating many metaphysical languages. I want to raise with you the issue of Sufism integrating poetical languages in addition to metaphysical ones. It seems to me that Sufism is not only a synthesis on the plane of ideas and languages but also on the plane of forms. Sufis wrote in all forms, in all genres, from the essay, to the story to the poem... I am alluding here to the extraordinary power of creativity within Sufism. and I have in mind*

specifically the wonderful *Mawâqif* (Stations) of Niffari.

*My question is: how can we link this creativity on all planes to the issue of modernity, which asserts that we are in an age which surpasses all forms and goes beyond all genres. Were not Sufis already doing this a long time ago?*

All synthesis is based on creativity. But the question you are alluding to has several dimensions. First of all, the power of creation of forms in Sufism is very different from what is being done in what is called "modernity" in the modern world today, because what people are trying to do in the modern world has no access to the world beyond forms. They break forms from below, whereas a form in a spiritual sense is like the outer shell of a walnut or of a pistachio which is necessary to protect the kernel within it.

Sufis had access to what Mawlânâ Jalâl el-Dîn Rûmî calls *ma'nâ* (meaning) in contrast to *şûrah* (form). *Şûrah* is not used here in the Aristotelian sense, but as the external form and *ma'nâ* is the inner meaning, the inner reality. The Sufi, by virtue of reaching the world of *ma'nâ*, of inner meaning, is freed from the constraints of external forms from above. All authentic creativity in traditional civilization takes place in this way, that is, it originates in the world of the formless, and as they enter into manifestation, they are back again in the world of forms.

It is important to note that in the modern world experimentation with forms in literature, painting, art, music etc. means breaking away from tradition! Tradition is seen only negatively by the modern mind. To be modern means to break away from tradition and create one's own forms. There is always something very individualistic in this outlook and what is called "creativity" which is very different from creativity in a traditional civilization.

The best example of liberation from all known forms is undoubtedly—as you mentioned—the *Mawâqif* of Niffari in

Arabic and, in Persian, the ecstatic poems of Mawlânâ" Jalâl al-Dîn al-Rûmî in his grand *Dîwân*. When you listen to these poems, they are unbelievably ecstatic and break all the norms of prosody used at that time.

But the creativity of both Niffarî and Rûmî is very different from some contemporary Persian or Arab poets who are trying to emulate Western poetry, and in Arabic you have what is called *al-shi'ir al-hurr* (Free Verse). The creativity of the great Sufis does not come from a foreign model or the ego center. There is not a need to express the individual, to express what you call "myself." The Sufis have already gone beyond the "self" and reached the Universal Reality. They teach from the "heart intellect," the "divine center" of our being which is the origin of form!

Of course there is always the imprint of the genius who invented these forms, but this does not mean only an individualistic expression, which is why one observes this continuity in the Sufi tradition that one does not see in the modern Western world.

You may have a great genius like Michelangelo or a great poet like John Keats but they do not mark a continuous tradition. They disappear and then after a while you have another genius, another star.

Rûmî, who lived 800 years ago, is much more alive in Iran today than any nineteenth century great English poet in England. So creativity yes, but creativity which comes from interiority, from inwardness; and the synthesis which you mentioned is not "intellectual" or artistic only. It is a synthesis which has definitely to do with the Sufi's access to the higher levels of Reality.

*Could you elaborate more on what you just said, that Rûmî is much more alive in Iran today than any English poet of the nineteenth century is in England? Why is it so, do you think?*

First of all, the West continues to be what I call an "anti-traditional" civilization, a civilization no longer based on abiding principles. This anti-traditional civilization began in the Renaissance but something of the traditional Middle Ages survived in Elizabethan England. This continuity can be found in the work of Shakespeare in England with in its deeper meaning being closely akin to the works of Dante in Italy. These two poets are very much alive today precisely because their works contain elements of tradition and therefore timeless truth. But what we see today in Western Europe and in America is an anti-traditional civilization, which means that every generation feels that it has to turn against perennial truth and preceding generations in order to express itself.

The reason for the continuous popularity of Rûmî today is that he is speaking from the realities which are timeless. Writers today choose to be timely, so timely as to become irrelevant—that is the heart of the matter. Rûmî does not speak of external things which change, but of the truth which we contain within ourselves, of metaphysical realities, of our journey through this world where we encounter certain problems, needs, nostalgias, experiences of love, withdrawal and intimations of death and immortality which do not change. If he had spoken only of the Anatolia of the thirteenth century, he would have been interesting only to historians of Anatolia.

A person such as Rûmî elaborated the thesis that we are in this world for a purpose: That we have come from God and we must return to God. And the great questions are discovered when you realize this ultimate Reality. I would say that, from the point of view of a person like Rûmî, most of the questions which are posed today are ill-posed questions, and so we try to provide answers to the wrong questions.

I would like to mention here that not only the Sufis within Islam spoke of the eternal truths, but also the Islamic philosophers. Suhrawardi, was himself both a Sufi and a philosopher at the same time, which are two distinct schools in

Islam.

The idea of "perennial philosophy"—which is now becoming somewhat popular in the West—goes back to a statement made by a librarian in the Vatican in the sixteenth century, Augustino Steuco, who coined the term "Philosophia Perennis". For Sufis and Islamic philosophers, Truth is timeless and is like gold which does not rust with time. Truth belongs to eternal *Sophia*. That is why long before Steuco Islamic philosophers such as Ibn Miskawayh have spoken of the *Sophia* or *philosophia perennis* (*al-ḥikmah al-khâlidah* or *jâwîdân-khivad*). In fact, maybe we should use: *Sophia Perennis* rather than *Philosophia Perennis*. On the highest level this *Sophia* was promulgated by the Prophet with the rise of Islam, having been resuscitated with Islamic Revelation. It is this *Sophia* to which the Qur'ân refers as "'al-dîn al-ḥanîf" (primordial monotheism). Someone like Rûmî not only tried to speak of this *Sophia*, but succeeded in doing so in the most eloquent of terms. That is why he speaks to us much more directly than any American poet writing in the 1990s.

*I want to go back to this issue of creativity in Sufism. You mentioned that creativity in Sufism is always linked to tradition, while modern poetry is not linked to tradition. But there is something fascinating about modern poetry, whether it be Western or Arab, and that is the fact that modern poetry, contrary to what you say wants to resource itself by going back to tradition. I would like to go back to Surrealism, for example. In his first manifesto, André Breton, one of the founders of the Surrealist movement, asserted that Surrealism takes its inspiration from mysticism. In fact, most of the surrealist poetry is impregnated with mysticism. Modern Arab poets themselves have been very influenced by this Surrealistic movement. Modern Arab poetry took its inspiration from two sources in general: first, the surrealist movement with its mystic tendency, and the second very important source of inspiration*

*being Sufism itself. My point is that modern Arab poetry is not cut off from tradition. Sufis such as al-Hallāj and al-Niffarī are very popular in modern Arabic poetry today.*

Yes. But one should be careful. When you say that modern poets want to go back to mysticism, what does that mean? To go back to mysticism means that one must be seriously a mystic. It means to follow a spiritual path and go back to God, which is what most modern Arab poets and modern Persian poets have not done.

Modern Arab poetry and modern Persian poetry (and by modern I do not mean contemporary but that which is imbued with the modernist ethos) began with the emulation of a foreign poetical form which was that of French and English, and to some extent German, language all belonging to western secularized civilization, not of a foreign civilization, such as medieval India, whose poetry was completely impregnated by religion. Modern Arab and Persian poets were influenced by the poetry of a world in which the poet is a lonely figure, not knowing what to do, bewildered, full of doubt, an irrational personage. Modern western poetry has been expelled from serious discourse about knowledge and separated from the sacred. It is interesting that the term "shi'ir" in Arabic, which means poetry, has to do with shu'ūr (consciousness or knowledge), whereas "poesis" has to do with "making."

*It is "techné."*

Exactly. This is the Greek meaning of poetry. While poetry in Medieval time was considered to be related to knowledge, as in the *Divine Comedy*. But the domain of knowledge was taken over by rationalistic philosophy, and later on by modern science; so poetry came to be simply the expression of sentiments and emotions. Romanticism tried to react against this, but romantic poets did not have the

intellectual content to produce a poetry which could seriously challenge the domains of philosophy and science which claimed for themselves the domain of knowledge. They did not have any impact whatsoever on the intellectual life of the West.

It was at this time that Arab and Persian poets encountered western poetry. They tried to emulate both the form and contents of this western poetry. They were outside of the Islamic tradition and for the most part did not have access to any Sufi circle, any *zâwiyah* or *halaqah*. They were not practicing Sufis, or in many cases even practicing Muslims. They forgot that Arabic is a divine language, the language of the Qur'ân.

Modern Arab and Persian poets became as alienated from their societies as is the western poet in western society. Their interest in mysticism, as you mention, was simply an individualistic, alienated interest. They did not become *faqîrs* or monks! They did not lead an ascetic and contemplative life as a mystic does in Islam or Christianity. They were only attracted by the beauty of Sufi poetry and in some cases mystical Christian poetry. Few of them knew the "imaginal" world, as Corbin would say, this world which opens up to the mystics.

A poet cannot function in a world in which the invisible world is "unreal." Serious poetry has to do with the world of imagination. The great voices among the poets, such as W.B. Yeats, T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, the three greatest poets of the English language, turned either to the world of mythology, as in the case of Yeats, or to the world of religion, specifically Christianity in the case of T. S. Eliot, or to Oriental poetry, especially Chinese and Persian, in the case of Pound.

Many modern Arab and Persian poets do not have a common language with their Muslim audience. You know as well as I that many modern poets in the Islamic world are not read by even 500 persons. You cannot take their poetry to the Khan al-Khalilî bazâr in Cairo, for example, and read it, but you



can take a poem of Ibn al-Fârid or Bûsîrî which are very difficult, and read it and people will come to you! Because people know that Ibn al-Fârid is talking about their spiritual culture, while most modern Muslim poets are not.

What is the most universal poetry in Islam? It is Sufi poetry, not the poetry of Farazdaq or Jarir. As far as Arabic is concerned, it is the poetry of Ibn al-Fârid, of Ibn `Arabî, the poetry of Sheikh al-`Alawî in Algeria, whose book had numerous editions! As for modern Arab and Persian poetry, I believe that it is mostly unlikely that it has produced as yet a poet who will last for centuries!

Creativity comes almost always from religion, from the inner life. It is not accidental that the foundations of all the vernacular languages are mystical. What is the first work in Italian? It is the poems of Saint Francis of Assisi and the *Divine Comedy*. What is the first work of the English language? It is the *Canterbury Tales* of Chaucer, which are the tales of religious pilgrims. What is the first work in German? It is Mister Eckhart *Sermons*.

This is an important lesson to learn. But in order to do so, modern Arab and Persian poets should become reintegrated into their own traditions, not only linguistically, but also spiritually.

All the great Persian and Arab poets did not claim that they were poets. They were poets despite themselves. I was teaching a course in Sufi Persian literature yesterday, and was reading the 13th century mystic Farîd ad-Din al-`Attâr with the students. He says: "I am not a poet. Do not look at my poetry as the work of a poet. Poetry flows from me. Do not look at my prosody. Look for the meaning." This is what real poetry is!

*You mentioned that Sufi poets were much more popular than modern Arab and Persian poets because they were linked to tradition. You also mentioned that people would come in*



*much greater number to listen to them than to listen to modern poets. My question is: should we evaluate poetry by the number of listeners or readers?*

Of course not. I agree with you that the reaction of the public is completely secondary. We have had great poets in Islamic civilization who were from the spiritual elite and who were not popular, and we have had poets who were very popular and at the same time of a very high quality. Finally, we have poets who were very popular but not of a very high spiritual quality. All three possibilities have existed.

In any case, we must not equate the fact that someone is very popular with the fact that his or her poetry is very profound and lasting. What makes poetry lasting is precisely the expression of lasting values which belong to the eternal world, to the world of the spirit. But the elite among traditional poets must not be compared with the modern poets who do not write for the *khawâss* (elite) of their own civilization at all although there are some exceptions.

*So, for you lasting poetry is spiritual poetry?*

Definitely. It is not only true in the case of poetry, but also of philosophy, as I mentioned before. Why is it that in the West a lot of people still read Plato rather than some of the philosophers of the eighteenth or nineteenth century, despite the fact that those later philosophers became so famous during their own days? It is because they were dealing with the transient, while Plato was dealing with the eternal.

To come back to Islam, the poets who are still famous are those who knew how to transcend their "ethnic" morals, who spoke of universal values rather than of local ones. You, as an Arab woman reading a Punjabi poet, will not be interested in his feelings towards his land, but rather in his description of the love of God, of the yearning of the soul and other universal aspects of human existence.

*What is the common boundary of Sufism and poetry? Is it the unveiling of the Invisible?*

There is more to it than that. The most profound element that connects Sufism to poetry is the following:

Sufism is a way for us to peel off the outward levels or dimensions of our being, the outside skin, and to penetrate to the heart of our being. Now, through this act of penetration to the center of our being a language is affected and becomes more interiorized. We know from anthropological and historical records that archaic people were very poetic and often spoke poetry more than prose.

In a sense when we talk in Islamic terms, we can say that Adam spoke poetry in the garden of Eden—there is no doubt about it. The sacred Scriptures are always highly "poetical," not only the Qur'ân, but also the *Upanishads*, the *I Ching*. It is because the spirit of human beings, when it comes in contact with the Divine Spirit, receives from It and participates in the cadences and rhythms of the spiritual world. Poetry is the language of the world of the Spirit and therefore the Sufi message finds poetry a most suitable vehicle for the expression of its teachings. Sufism is able to mold language in such a way as to bring out the inner meaning of things. The person who writes "authentic" Sufi poetry has recourse to words which emanate from another level of being than an ordinary poet. It also addresses another level of our being; the level of dancing in front of God, always in a state of rhythmic melodies which pour out in the form of poetry. It is interesting that the great Sufi poets never claimed to be poets!

*Because they were so absorbed in this union with God, and with the universe, to the point that they were not aware of the poetry flowing in them through this union?*

Exactly. But let us be careful. They were not united with

the universe. They were united with what is beyond the universe. They were united with the Divine Realities, of which the universe is but a manifestation. Their poetry is the product of something else that is taking place. The Sufi poets were the channel through which metaphysical realities were flowing into the human order.

*To explore these Divine Realities that you are mentioning, do you think the Sufi needs to be isolated, cut from society? I know that you mention in your book Sufi Essays that: "Sufism can be practised in any circumstances in which man finds himself, in the traditional world as well as in the modern world." You add further in the same page: "Since it is based on the social and juridical teachings of Islam, Sufism is meant to be practised within society and not in a monastic environment outside the social order" (1991:37). Don't you think that a Sufi is in exile even if he or she lives in society?*

What I meant by saying "Sufism can be practised within society," was that the Sufi can be a carpenter, a banker, a university professor, and does not live in a monastic situation, cut off from the activity of the society. But Sufism is not rooted *in* society or *outside* society. Sufism is rooted in God. Therefore the roots of the Sufi who is performing his functions in society are not in this world; they are in God.

But the second point you are alluding to is a very important one, which is that a spiritual person is always in exile in this world. `Attâr used to sell herbs. The fact that he was selling herbs does not mean he was a worldly person. We read in his verse that his love for God was very intense even when he was selling herbs.

The idea of exile is a very profound theme in all of mysticism, and emphasized in Islam. You have the famous *ḥadīth* of the Prophet: "Islam started in exile and will return as it started ; and happy are those who are in exile." This *ḥadīth*

has been interpreted by Sufis on so many levels. A spiritual person is a *gharib* (stranger, exile) in this world. This theme has been beautifully treated by Suhrawardī in his "Qisat al-Ghurbah al- Gharbiyyah" (The Tale of the Occidental Exile) which is one of the great masterpieces in philosophical mysticism in Islam. A spiritual person must feel a certain sense of "exile" in this world which is in fact the sign of his or her sincerity toward God. But this has nothing to do with the manner in which he lives outwardly.

When I wrote this passage in *Sufi Essays*, I was talking about how the phenomenon of mysticism manifests itself in Islam. If you take a plane and travel to Spain, for example, you will find many Catholic monasteries. If you go to India, you will find many ashrams. People in those two places might finish their outward activities and go to these places to pray and contemplate but there are no such places in Islam. If you go to the bazār of Damascus, you might stumble upon a great Sufi sitting in his shop. There is no place in Islam where you withdraw from society in an external way.

*But...even in Islam, we have orders. The Sufis have their own orders*

Of course we have Sufi orders in Islam. But the members of all these Sufi orders are integrated within society. If you go to a city like Cairo today, where the Sufi orders are very much alive, and you attend one of the Sufi gatherings, let us say in the mosque of al-Husayn, where branches of the Shādhiliyyah order regularly meets, you can see people participating in invocations, prayers and chantings. Then, after the meeting, they all go home. Nearly all of them are married and have many children. And the next morning, you might find some of those who were chanting selling sweets in a shop or working in a factory. We do have Sufi orders, but they are a society within the society and not an organization formally

separated from the rest of society.

*But Sufi orders have their own rituals, and some of these rituals are very sophisticated.*

Of course. If you take Sufism seriously, then that implies first of all the "rite of initiation," in the same way as when you are born in Islam, and your parents whisper in your ears: "There is no god but God and Muḥammad is his Prophet." In Christianity, we have baptism. One is born in this way into a religious community. Sufism is the esoteric dimension of Islam. It implies making a *bay'ah* which has been handed down over the generations going back to the Prophet. The rites of Sufism are the rites of Islam: Prayer, fasting, Hajj... But Sufis have also their own forms of invocation, chanting, forms of meditation which cannot be done without the power of initiation, without special rites. The program of Sufism is very simple: To become saintly, you must remember God—that is all you have to do. The Qur'ān keeps repeating this over and over again: "Remember me and I remember you." So you might say, then why go into all this meditation, chanting and ritual? The problem is that the human mind is scattered. When we are sitting here and talking, you cannot concentrate on anything for more than a few moments. You think of your lunch or meeting in the afternoon, and so on. The things which are before our eyes we do not remember! Much less do we remember the Divine Realities which at the present moment are absent from us!

So all these Sufi techniques which some people do not understand and attack as *bid'ah* (innovation) are established to bring the mind together. Sufism contains the most profound methods of meditation, combined with invocation of the Names of God and with chanting, poetry music and dancing, as in the Mawlawi orders.

Here I want to make the following remark : Dancing in

Sufism is important, because we are not only mind and soul, but also body. Muslims believe that the body will be resurrected and that resurrection is both physical and spiritual. Muslims believe that the Prophet (peace be upon him) went on his *al-mi'râj* (nocturnal ascension) not only with his soul but also with his body. A spiritual ascension is relatively easy. What is special in the ascension of the Prophet is that it was also physical.

*But you know that there is controversy on this issue. Some Muslim thinkers argue that the Prophet traveled by his soul, not by his body...*

This is nonsense! Traditional Islam asserts that the Prophet ascended bodily. It does not mean the same thing to say that he ascended by his soul. A similar situation exists in Christianity, when we talk about Christ going to heaven. Traditional Christianity believes that Christ was taken "bodily" to heaven! What ascended to heaven was not the soul of Christ only, but the body of Christ too! Catholics believe also that the Virgin Mary did not die. She was taken to heaven "bodily." I have written extensively on this issue, and I am not going to expand more on it!

But, to go back to this issue of Sufi dance which many people criticize : It is a sacred dance that integrates the body into our inner being which is in contact with the Divine Presence. If you watch people listening to a concert of serious classical music, for a example a concert of Bach's *St. Matthew's Passion*, you will see people sit still and listen to the music and appreciate it inwardly. But if you hear a concert of traditional Arab or Persian music, you will see that members of the audience listen but also move their bodies. The music is as "spiritual" as the music of Bach. You will see the same phenomenon if you go to India or Black Africa, because these civilizations have never become totally "cerebral" and cut off

their contact with the body. In the modern West, people became cerebral and the body became a "machine." The result was that "dancing" in the West became a "profane" activity, mostly an activity to arouse sexual passions, while the Sufi dance is an esoteric dance meant to integrate soul, mind and body.

*This integration of the body through dancing has also a "cosmic" dimension, since by whirling, the dervishes imitate the circulating of the heavenly bodies.*

Absolutely. But you have to be careful when using the terms "cosmos" and "cosmic." "Cosmos" in the modern sense is nothing other than a mass banging around, full of energy, with no meaning related to the world of spirit. Today it is becoming fashionable to speak about "cosmic expansion." What one should really mean is that there is a correspondence between us, as human beings, and the cosmos as seen "traditionally." The cosmos as seen "traditionally" comprises the levels of reality below God including the world of angels which stands at high levels of cosmic reality. The cosmos in the Islamic sense represents God's creation with all its multiple levels of reality, from the material and below God.

In that sense, yes the Sufis accomplish a "cosmic" dance; they bring about a kind of *ʿinshirâḥ* (expansion) to identify with the cosmic reality. When we talk about the cosmos, we should mention the microcosm (*al-ʿâlam al-saghîr*) and the macrocosm (*al-ʿâlam-al-kabîr*). Both microcosm and macrocosm are reflections of a metacosmic Reality.

When we talk about the integration of the Sufi with the cosmos, we should therefore be careful. Integration is not scattering. What good is it for us is to identify with all this Milky Way running around with its thousands of millions of particles of dust. It does not mean anything! It only shows the grandeur of God's creation. You cannot identify with it. What



you *can* identify with is that order which in fact the word "cosmos" traditionally means, with all the levels of reality which are below God, which ultimately support the aim and prepare us for reaching God.

Many people today, specifically those belonging to what is called "New Age Spirituality," talk about "Cosmic Consciousness." What does "Cosmic Consciousness" mean? It should really be referred to as "Metacosmic Consciousness." "Cosmic Consciousness" is a step toward the "Metacosmic Consciousness."

Furthermore, some people do not need the cosmic consciousness step. They go directly from the microcosm to God, like the great woman Sufi saint Râbî'ah al-'Adawîyyah. There is a story told about her, that on a beautiful spring day, someone came to her and knocked at her door and said: "Come out and see how beautiful is God's creation: the trees and flowers are blooming." And Râbî'ah answered: "Why don't you come *in* and see how beautiful is God's garden within the soul?"

For some people, the association of nature, the appreciation of the cosmos as God's creation, is a very important step, because that leads to the realization of the Divine.

In any case, the Sufis' practices that you allude to have as their ultimate function ultimately our integration through the spiritual path into the Divine Reality. The awareness of our cosmic correspondences with the cosmos at large is a stage of the path. The way of union *wişâl* includes always a stage of '*inbisât*, *inshirâh* (expansion) which precedes it. We have in fact the three supreme steps of the spiritual path : *qabḍ* (contraction) , *baṣṭ* (expansion) and *wişâl* (union).

The cosmic identification to which you allude is always in relation to the Prophet, to the Muḥammadan Reality (al-ḥaqîqah al-Muḥamadîyyah), which means that the cosmic expansion of man is in relation to the Prophet, not to the



Prophet as a man who lived in the seventh century in Arabia, not to his external reality, but to Muḥammad as the whole of the cosmos as manifested by God. The deepest sense of *al-ḥaqīqah al-Muḥamadīyyah* is the reality of the cosmos and corresponds the stage of *inbiʾāt*.

*The Reality of Muḥammad is closely connected to the theme of the Perfect Man. I have in mind specifically what ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Jīlī wrote in his al-ʾInsān al-Kāmil and also what Ibn ʿArabī himself wrote on this same issue. How can we define the Perfect Man?*

This is the most important issue in Sufism after *waḥdat al-wujūd* (Unity of Reality). We can only define the universal man from on high, not from below, that is, in relation to God. The universal man is that being who reflects the totality of God's names and His Qualities. He is that being who is not limited by the governance of a single Divine Name but reflects all the Divine Names. He is a mirror in which God can contemplate Himself as Ibn ʿArabī says. He is the perfection of the human state. You cannot define the universal man in accordance with our imperfections and perfections. It is *we* who are defined by the universal man, we as men and women of this world. All the perfections we aspire to are due to the fact that the universal man exists at the center of our beings and is the reality of our beings. We are, in a sense, creatures who always live below our level.

When the Qurʾān says: *thumma radadnahu asfala sāfilīn* (Then do We abase him [to be] the lowest of the low), one of its meanings is precisely that we live below our level, because God created us in the best of stature "*fī aḥsan taqwīm.*" then He cast us into the world of time, of materiality, of imperfection.

Today, we human beings are defined according to an external social pattern. To be *normal* or *abnormal* is defined

in accordance with what is done externally in society. Sufism is just the other way round. In Sufism, a normal person is a saint, because the universal man is the norm in Sufism, and so we all live below the norm. In today's society a saint is abnormal, while a person who goes to work from nine to five, and who comes home and watches television, is the norm.

*You mentioned that the doctrine of the Perfect Man is the most important doctrine in Sufism after the unity of Reality (waḥdat al-wujūd). You are one of the first who have written extensively in English on this theme, and one of its strongest adepts. "What is waḥdat al-wujūd?"*

*Waḥdat al-wujūd* is not a doctrine that is meant to be understood in its deepest sense by everyone. One of the glories of the Islamic Revelation is that its doctrines are for everyone, yet at the same time there are levels of meaning which are not for everyone.

To understand *waḥdat al-wujūd* is to understand *al-tawḥīd* (There is no God but God) at the highest level of the meaning of this expression. To understand it at the highest level requires one of two things:

1. A very high metaphysical understanding and intellectual intuition, which not everybody has.
2. An inner purification up to the stage where the soul experiences its own *fanā'*, its own extinction.

*Waḥdat al-wujūd* derives from these two sources: Either an intellectual understanding that there can be only one Reality ultimately, intellect being understood, not in the modern sense of the term, as equivalent to rational, but in a gnostic sense, as in the Platonic intellect; or a remarkable experience which only those who have had it inwardly can describe. In that case, you have to trust the people who have had it.

Suhrawardī said once: "I am astounded that people trust the word of those who spend their time doing *raṣd* (observation

of the stars) and take their word for it, but they do not trust the astronomers of the stars of our spiritual world."

If you take the word of those who have had the experience, you must accept the thesis that there is this miraculous possibility for the human being to experience his own nothingness, which is logically contradictory, for if we are nothing, we cannot experience it, we can have no "consciousness" of it. If we do, that is because *qalb al mu'min 'arsh al-rahmân*" (The heart of the believer is the throne of the Merciful). That is, God is within us.

This is the deepest meaning of *anâ l-ḥaqq* (I am the Truth) of Hallāj. The ultimate *fanâ'* (annihilation) is when our ego dies and God says *anâ*" within us. The *anâ l-ḥaqq* of Hallāj is one of the earliest expressions of *wahdat al-wujūd* (Unity of Reality), though many people do not wish to talk about it or understand it this way, except that the Hallajian formulation deals with this truth, from the pole of the subject rather than the object. What Hallāj wanted to say is that there is only one *anâ*, only one "I."

When a person reaches such a stage, he realizes that this table is not simply a table; this chair is not simply a chair. There is no reality independent of God, because God is *al-ḥaqq*. The word *al-ḥaqq* in classical Arabic does not only mean truth, it also means Reality. So if we believe that the sky itself is an independent reality, we are a mushrik (a heretic). *Wahdat al-wujūd* means to realize that nothing has a reality unless it is God's Reality. It does not mean that this table is God. But it means that to the extent that this table is *real*, its *reality* cannot be other than God.

*Its reality is a tajallî, a reflection of the Reality of God?*

Yes, *tajalliyat*, theophanies. Sufism has elaborated so much on it.

In this sense, nature itself is a theophany, nature should be read as a theophany.

Yes.

*I want to go back to the cry of Hallâj: "anâ l-ḥaqq" ( I am the Truth), and raise with you what has been labeled as the "Christian influence" on Islamic mysticism. In "Présence de Louis Massignon," you wrote the following: " Hallâj represents within Sufism the special grace of Christ as it manifests itself in the Islamic universe. He is a Christic Sufi, if we can use such a term, that is, he manifests al-barakah al-`isawiyah as it is said in Arabic, within him. It is not that he was influenced by Christianity as another tradition, another religion. But the structure of Islam is such that, within the Islamic tradition there is a possibility of the shining forth of the ray of the founders of other religions, especially of Judaism and Christianity (1987:50). Can you elaborate, especially on the last sentence?*

Each religion has its own structure. Christianity is Christocentric, meaning that Christ is at the center of the religion, which is why no Christian will be angry if you call his religion Christianity, while a Muslim will be angry if you call his religion Muḥammadism, because Islam is Theo-centered, Allah-centered. Now in this Christian universe, Christ is the sun (if we can apply this symbology). When the sun comes out in the day, all the stars disappear for the rays of the sun eclipse the other stars. In Christianity, the prophets, such as Moses, David, Abraham, are not forgotten, but they do not play an essential role in the spiritual and religious economy of the Christian universe. For example, you do not have in Christianity a prayer of Abraham as you have in Islam.

*You mean as in the end of the Prayer, we say: "God, pray*

*on our Prophet Muḥammad as You prayed on our Prophet Abraham?"*

Right. But there are also other prayers. The Islamic universe is very different, precisely because it is the final synthesis of the religions that had gone before it. Islam might be compared to a night sky, where the Prophet is the full moon. It is not accidental that, in Islam, the moon is the symbol of Islam rather than the sun. In the Japanese flag, one can see the sun in the middle of the flag, while there is not a single Islamic flag with the sun standing by itself as the central symbol. There lies here a very deep meaning: In spiritual astrology, the moon is also the last of the planets which integrates all the cosmic influences before these influences come to earth, and the Prophet represents the moon in that aspect. In the night sky, the moon is the most evident and luminous of all lights. But other stars which symbolize the other prophets are also present. Islam itself is the whole sky. If we follow this symbol and understand the message it conveys, you can say that, in Islam the Prophet is a central manifestation of God. The Prophet leads us to God, for in Islam, you cannot reach God as a Muslim, without the help of the Prophet: This is of course an impossibility.

Nevertheless, God has allowed the other prophets, especially the prophets of the Abrahamic line, to manifest themselves within this Muḥammadan universe ( at this point I use this expression on purpose) as stars in the firmament, but not as suns.

So Christ is the central sun of the Christian universe, but it is not as the sun that he influences the Islamic world, but as a star in the Islamic firmament. Ibn `Arabī elaborated in his *Fusūs al- Hikam* (Bezels of Wisdom) on this issue. He devoted a chapter to each prophet, to each form of wisdom. Thus you have a *ḥikmah mūsawīyyah* (Mosaique wisdom), a *ḥikma `ādamiyyah* (Adamic wisdom), and so forth, where each

prophet is a special manifestation of the Logos.

Certain Sufis, called Christic Sufis, were not influenced by Christianity as a religion, or by Christian monks, but by the Christ-like type of spirituality. They had a special love for Christ as he manifested himself in the Islamic universe. Other Sufis expressed their love for certain other prophets, such as David or Moses...

*Ibn 'Arabî speaks at length of Christ in his "Futûhât." He even calls Christ "my master".*

Ibn 'Arabî had a particular relation with Christ. He considers Christ to be the seal of Sanctity of the Abrahamic family, and Ibn 'Arabî considered himself to be the seal of Muḥammadan sanctity (al-wilâyah al-Muḥamadiyyah).

So there is a very elaborate and esoteric correspondence in Ibn 'Arabî's doctrine. The mistake that many orientalisists make when they study those Sufis is that they think that, if someone is a Sufi who has a certain Christ-like quality or attachment to Christ, he must be secretly a Christian or influenced by Christianity!. This is not at all the case! It is God's will that the other prophets also perform a function in the Muḥammadan universe, precisely because they are also elements of that religious universe.

*When you just mentioned the misinterpretations of the orientalisists, were you alluding to Asin Palacios? Specifically I have in mind his title "Islam Christianizado"?*

That title means that the whole of Sufism is a manifestation of Christian influence within Islam. But I think also that to a certain extent, what Asin was doing was to cover himself. He was a Catholic priest in the Spain of the 1920s and 1930s, in which nobody dared to speak about the influence of Islamic culture in Spain and the significance of Islam in that

land! So when people attacked him, as talking about this influence on Christian Spain, he would defend himself by saying: "look, this Islamic influence is itself impregnated with Christianity! Moreover, the origins of Muslim civilization are Christian!" But Asin Palacios was a great scholar. Look at all the positive studies he did on Islamic culture, and the positive things he wrote on Sufism in Andalusia! He made the first major study of Ibn `Arabî in a European language! We must take this into account!

*Amira El-Zein*

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## **IS ISLAM SECULARIZABLE?**

Among the memorable experiences I have had in recent years was listening to the Chairman of the Anthropology Department at Cambridge University, the eminent theoretician and student of North African Islam, Ernest Gellner, declare Islam inherently unsecularizable. This came in a lecture delivered at Princeton University's Near Eastern Studies Department in the Spring of 1990. The message came through loud and clear: among the world's great historical religions, Islam stands alone - for one reason or another- in being impervious to secularization. At the time, I applauded Gellner's raw assertion for making the implicit explicit once and for all without either beating around the bush or resorting to polite euphemisms. I thought, then, that Gellner did everyone a favor by bringing out into the open (harshly, crudely and bluntly), this widely held and deeply entrenched view both in the West and among Muslim fundamentalist circles everywhere.

Now I would like to submit this assumption to some critical examination from both a historico-theoretical angle as well as from a politico-practical one. But, first, let me point out that though the immediate context in which this issue is being addressed is by and large a "Western" context, it is simply not true that the problem of the secularizability of Islam is either



primarily a "Western" question or even a "new" question. The fact of the matter is that this issue, and many others like it, has been on the agenda of modern Arab and Muslim thought and history since about Bonaparte's occupation of Egypt in 1798. It is also the kind of question that Arabs, for example, have been uninterruptedly interrogating themselves about, trying to come to terms with and attempting to settle since at least the last quarter of the 19th century; i.e., since what we Arabs often refer to in our recent past as the Arab Renaissance, the Arab Awakening, the Islamic Reformation, or what the late expert on the period, Albert Hourani, aptly called the "Liberal Age" of Arab thought.

In my attempt to formulate a more realistic answer to the question: *Is Islam secularizable?* I shall start by raising another question : Was the simple, egalitarian and unadorned Islam of Mecca and Medina (Yathreb) at the time of the Prophet and the first four Rightly-Guided Caliphs (chosen by the then-emerging Muslim community as his successors) compatible with the hereditary dynastic kingships of such complex empires, stratified societies and hierarchical polities as Byzantium and Sassanid Persia at the time of the Arab-Muslim conquest of those mighty realms? The accurate answer is twofold : (a) dogmatically NO; the two were completely incompatible; (b) historically YES; the two became very compatible and in an incredibly short period of time. The historical YES issued, then, in the imperial hereditary Caliphate that lasted through the thick and thin of history until its formal abolition by Mustafa Kemal Ataturk soon after the First World war. The dogmatic NO of that same charismatic founding moment [issued] in Islam's famous historical opposition movements with all the multifarious forms that they eventually assumed. Probably nothing in Islam's early history represents the dogmatic NO more pristinely and paradigmatically than the Kharijite armed opposition to the institutionalization of early Muslim rule in the form of a hereditary dynastic caliphate of the imperial sort.

I am using "dogmatic," here, not in its current pejorative sense, but in its classical meaning of what the community of believers takes to be the correct system of beliefs, i.e., orthodoxy. The early Muslim dogmatists, literalists, purists, and scripturalists were absolutely right at the time of the first Arab conquests to insist that nothing in the Muslim orthodoxy of the day could make the Islam of Medina, Mecca and the four Rightly-Guided Caliphs compatible with hereditary monarchy of the imperial kind. But the historicists won the day and prevailed as we all know. Furthermore, I can confidently assert that, broadly speaking, whenever the dogmatic NO in Islamic history (correct as it may have been scripturally and literally in its own time) came in outright conflict with the historical YES (incorrect and unorthodox as it may have seemed at its own moment) the historical YES tended to win out and prevail over the dogmatic NO. This victory [was] used often to reach the point of completely obliterating and supplanting the purist NO of the moment.

To bring this matter nearer to Western readers, I would like to give a European example of what I mean by the historical YES and the dogmatic NO. I would regard, for instance, the movement of Monsignor Marcel Lefebvre and his followers in Europe and the United States as an excellent example of the Church's persisting purist dogmatic NO to modern times' reigning paradigm of a dynamic, spreading and evolving secular humanism, religious pluralism, mutual tolerance, freedom of conscience, a scientifically based culture and so on. At the same time I would regard the Second Vatican Council, convened by Pope John XXIII, resulting in the Conciliar Church as an equally excellent example of the final triumph of the historical YES in the life of the Roman Church over that classical dogmatic NO.

By the same token, I would argue that the accurate answer to our primary question, *Is Islam secularizable?* is also twofold : (a) dogmatically, NO, it is not secularizable; (b)

historically, YES, it is secularizable. In fact I would contend that without a good grasp of the ups and downs of this on-going YES to the secularization process of contemporary socio-historical Islam, no explanation of the ferociousness of the current fundamentalist reaction or of the accompanying aggressive resurgence and assertiveness of the dogmatic NO all over again, can be regarded as either adequate or satisfactory.

Islam, as a coherent static ideal of eternal and permanently valid principles, is of course compatible with nothing other than itself. As such, it is the business of Islam to reject, resist and combat secularism and secularization to the very end - like any other major religion viewed under the aspect of eternity. But Islam as a living dynamic evolving faith, responding to widely differing environments and rapidly shifting historical circumstances, incontrovertibly proved itself highly compatible with all the major types of politics and varied forms of social and economic organization that human history produced and threw up in the lives of peoples and societies: from kingship to republic, from slavery to freedom, from tribe to empire, from ancient city state to modern nation-state. Similarly, Islam as a world-historical religion stretching over 15 centuries has unquestionably succeeded in implanting itself in a whole variety of societies, a whole multiplicity of cultures, a whole diversity of life-forms, ranging from the tribal-nomadic to the centralized bureaucratic to the feudal-agrarian to the mercantile-financial, to the capitalist-industrial.

In light of these palpable historical facts, adaptations and precedents, to declare Islam inherently unsecularizable is over-hasty, biased and premature, to say the least. For, obviously, Islam has had to be very plastic, adaptable, malleable and infinitely reinterpretable to survive and flourish under such contradictory circumstances as referred to above. Thus, to insist *a priori*, à la Gellner and Co., that Islam is forever incapable of somehow coming to terms with and adapting to the reigning humanist-secularist paradigm of our

times, is epistemologically to rush in where angels fear to tread.

In fact I can see some confirmation of this general conclusion coming from the most unlikely quarter of the Islamic Revolution in Iran. Even there, one can detect a kind of left-handed compliment paid to the power of the contemporary historical YES as against the standard dogmatic NO of the purists. Consider, for instance, that the Iranian Ayatollahs, in their moment of victory, did not proceed to restore the Islamic Caliphate-and there was a Shi'i Caliphate in Muslim history nor-did they erect an Imamate or vice-Imamate, but proceeded to establish a republic for the first time in Iran's long history. A republic with popular elections, a constituent assembly, a parliament (where real debates take place), a president, a council of ministers, political factions, a constitution (which is a clone of the 1958 French Constitution), a kind of supreme court and so on, all of which has absolutely nothing to do with Islam as history, orthodoxy and dogma, but everything to do with modern Europe as practices, institutions, political accommodations and governmental arrangements. What makes this phenomenon doubly important is the fact that the Iranian clerics and guardians of Shi'i orthodoxy, dogmatic purity etc., have always been ferocious opponents of Republicanism and republics, denouncing them as absolutely un-Islamic. They successfully frustrated all previous attempts at declaring Iran a republic by earlier reforming rulers in the name of the dogmatic NO of orthodox Islam, and the rejection of European models, imported institutions, alien political arrangements and so on.

Note also that in spite of the Islamic idiom, the politico-ideological discourses, debates and polemics of the Iranian clerics and guardians of correct belief are substantively dictated by the historical YES of the present socio-economic-political conjuncture rather than the exigencies of the dogmatic NO of orthodoxy. This is why we find the public discourses of Iran's ruling Mullahs dealing not so much with theology, dogma, the Caliphate and/or Imamate, but with

economic planning, social reform, re-distribution of wealth, the right of private property as against the right to distributive justice, imperialism, economic dependency, development, the role of the popular masses (as against that of technocratic elites), without forgetting such issues as identity, modernization, authenticity etc. Consider the following words of admonition addressed by a Third World leader to his country's religious schools :

If you pay no attention to the politics of the imperialists and consider religion to be simply the few topics you are always studying and never go beyond them, then the imperialists will leave you alone. Pray as much as you like: it is your oil they are after- why should they worry about your prayers? They are after our minerals, and want to turn our country into a market for their goods. That is the reason why the puppet governments they have installed prevent us from industrializing, and instead establish only assembly plants and industry that is dependent on the outside world.

These could have been easily the words of such secular leaders of the sixties, as President Nasser of Egypt, President Sukarno of Indonesia and/or the very early Fidel Castro of Cuba; but they are in fact the words of Ayatollah Khomeiny himself. Obviously the historical and republican YES has scored some kind of a victory in Iran against the long-standing and officially declared dogmatic NO.

Since the question of the secularizability of Islam is really neither a pure matter of the spirit nor of mere clashes of ideas nor of conflicting theological speculations and interpretations, but is an affair of real history, power politics and clashes of material forces, the dialectical opposition and interpenetration of the historical YES and the dogmatic NO tend to work themselves out in human affairs and societies quite violently with all the attendant destructions, dislocations,

breakdowns, protracted struggles, creative energies and innovative outcomes. This is attested to historically by the ever recurring inter-Islamic armed conflicts, civil wars, insurrections etc., and at present by the current violence of and against armed insurrectionary fundamentalist Islam, practically everywhere.

To be noted in this connection as well is the fact that in such key countries as Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Algeria, Turkey etc., there is hardly anything in society, economy, polity, culture and law that is run anymore according to Islamic precepts, administered along the lines of Shari'a law or functions in conformity with theological doctrine and/or teachings. Outside the realm of personal status, individual belief and private piety and/or impiety, the role of Islam has unquestionably receded to the periphery of public life. In other words, inspect in any one of those states, the factory, the bank, the market place, the officer corps, the political party, the state apparatus, the school, the university, the laboratory, the court-house, the arts, the media etc., and you will quickly realize that there is very little religion left in them.

Even in a state like Saudi Arabia where the ruling tribal elite wraps itself so conspicuously in the mantels of strict Muslim orthodoxy, moral purity, bedouin austerity and social uprightness, the contradiction between outward official pretense, on the one hand and the real substance of life on the other, has become so wide, sharp and explosive that those still taking the religious pretenses seriously staged the armed insurrection which occupied the Meccan Holy shrine in 1979, shaking the kingdom to its foundations in the process. Their declared goal was no more than rectifying that schizophrenic condition, i.e., putting an end to that ludicrous discrepancy between official ideology and reality by bringing the substance of Saudi life again in strict conformity with religious orthodoxy as officially announced and propounded.

In the above-mentioned countries, the modern secular-nationalist calendar, with its new holidays, symbols,

monuments, historical sites, battles, heroes, ceremonies and memorial days, has come to fill the public square, relegating in the process the old religious calendar and its landmarks to the margins of public life. This is why the truly radical Muslim fundamentalists complain not so much about the unsecularizability of Islam, but rather about "Islam's eclipse and isolation from life," about "the absence of Islam from all realms of human activity, because it has been reduced to mere prayer, the fast, the pilgrimage and alms giving," about how "Islam faces today the worst ordeal in its existence as a result of materialism, individualism and nationalism," about how "school and university curricula, though not openly critical of religion, effectively subvert the Islamic world-picture and its attendant practices," about how "the history of Islam and the Arabs is written, taught and explained without reference to divine intervention causal or otherwise," about how "modern and nominally Muslim nation-states, though they never declare a separation of State and Mosque, they, nonetheless, subvert Islam as a way of life, as an all-encompassing spiritual and moral order and as a normative integrative force by practicing a more sinister *defacto* form of functional separation of state and religion." Obviously these radical fundamentalists have a superior appreciation, in their own way, of the nature of the modern forces and processes gnawing at the traditional fabric of Muslim societies, cultures and polities, than the social scientists, experts and mainstream Mullahs who keep repeating the formula: "Islam is unsecularizable."

Consequently, these radical insurrectionary Islamists keenly resent the fact that contemporary Islam has gone a long way in the direction of privatization, personalization and even individualization to the point of allowing its basic tenets to turn into optional beliefs, rituals and acts of worship. To reverse this seemingly irreversible trend they literally (and not figuratively) go to war in order to achieve what they call the re-Islamization of currently nominally Muslim societies, cultures and polities.



They resent no less keenly: (a) the extent to which traditional gender hierarchies continue to be destabilized, shaken and altered in contemporary Muslim societies; (b) the slow erosion of the traditional power of males over females accompanying such major social shifts as urbanization, the switch to the nuclear family, the wider education, training and gainful employment of women; (c) the steady growth of competing obligations, opportunities and openings attracting women from strictly traditional roles; (d) the tendency towards greater egalitarian gender relations in marriage and life in general; (e) the reproduction of society, through the socialization of children, according to norms that they regard as totally un-Islamic. Hence, their anger over the whole feminist issue, their nervous discourses over the Muslim family and its fate, their preoccupation with Muslim socialization of children and their militant demands for such measures as the reimposition on women, (and the young and the family in general) of the norms of traditional respect, obedience, gender segregation and undivided loyalty to the male head of the household.

It should not escape attention, in this connection, that Muslim countries in general and Arab societies in particular have witnessed, since the end of the last century, an uninterrupted commotion of sharp debates, discussions, polemics, rebuttals, counter-rebuttals and struggles over the gender issue and its ramifications for the family, the role of women in society at large, the socialization of children and the kind of norms according to which society is to reproduce itself. For example, Naguib Mahfouz's trilogy of novels about Cairene life in the first part of this century dates the collapse of the male dominated and dictatorially run traditional Muslim household in Cairo at exactly the moment of Egypt's great revolution against British colonial rule in 1919. The society of Muslim Brothers - the mother of all Islamic fundamentalisms in the Arab World - was founded a few years later as a reaction to the secularizing



forces and processes unleashed by that revolution.

I would like to emphasize my general point by the following citation from one of Naguib Mahfouz's articles describing the murky and confused condition of a typical Cairene Muslim struggling willy-nilly with the paradoxes, anomalies and antinomies generated daily by a long-term historical secularization process, glimpsed by most only intermittently and through a glass darkly:

He leads a contemporary (i.e., "modern") life. He obeys civil and penal laws of Western origin and is involved in a complex tangle of social and economic transactions and is never certain to what extent these agree with or contradict his Islamic creed. Life carries him along in its current and he forgets his misgivings for a time until one Friday he hears the imam or reads the religious page in one of the papers, and the old misgivings come back with a certain fear. He realizes that in this new society he has been afflicted with a split personality : Half of him believes, prays, fasts and makes the pilgrimage. The other half renders his values void in banks and courts and in the streets, even in the cinemas and theaters, perhaps even at home among his family before the television set.

This account feels so genuine and true to the actually lived experience of Muslims everywhere that no *a priori* unsecularizability formula should ever be allowed to obscure it.

As far as the Arab World is concerned, one source of confusion concerning this question of unsecularizability lies, as it seems to me, in the fact that Arab societies never witnessed a high dramatic Kemalist instant, where the state is declared from the top secular and officially separate from religion as happened with the emergence of modern Turkey from the ashes of the First World War. This process attained its climactic moment in Mustafa Kemal's famous abolition of the Caliphate in 1924.

Now, to sensitize Western readers to the enormity of Mustafa Kemal's act and the great dismay and shock it spread throughout the Muslim World at the time, all that is needed is a moment's reflection over what would have happened had the triumphant Italian nationalists in 1871, proceeded to abolish the Papacy after annexing the papal domains to the Italian kingdom - instead of recognizing the Pope's sovereignty over the Vatican City and his spiritual leadership of all Roman Catholics everywhere. We know, of course, that in 1922, Ataturk did toy with the idea of an "Italian" solution to the problem of the Caliphate, but he ended up rejecting all such compromises to cut at the root, all future legitimist claims and restorationist movements.

In contrast to the Turkish - Kemalist instance, the secularization process in key Arab societies has been slow, informal, hesitant, adaptive, absorbent, pragmatic, gradualistic, full of halfway houses, partial compromises, transient marriages of convenience and plenty of temporary retreats and unending evasions, but no striking moment of high drama. That sort of climactic point could have come to pass - somewhat on the Kemalist model - at the hands of President Nasser of Egypt soon after the nationalization of the Suez Canal in 1956 (a heroic and immensely popular act all over the Arab World.) But, Nasser never took that step and the real high drama arrived with the reaction to all that in the form of Islamic fundamentalism, revivalism, armed insurrectionary Islam and so on.

Let me note in passing that while Turkey, the core of the old empire, had the sufficient resources, will, and fighting power to beat back the invading allies of those days, the much weaker Arab periphery fell easy prey to colonial rule, dismemberment and fragmentation.

The subscribers to the unsecularizability thesis, both East and West, should have received a rude shock from the way in which the Soviet Union collapsed. I mean, here, those who for

many years now have been expecting the break-up of the "Evil Empire" at the hands of its Muslim people and components. For example, such experts on Soviet Islam as Helene Carrere d'Encausse, Alexander Benningsen and Amir Tahiri have held for a long time that the mortal danger to the Communist Union lay in the unchanging bed-rock of the Islamic identity which, they predicted, will one day bring about its demise through some sort of a Muslim revolution, explosion or eruption against the secular and secularizing center. For them, "a Soviet Russian remains a Russian, a Soviet Muslim simply a Muslim." In other words, according to this static identitarian logic a Soviet and/or socialist and/or secular Russian is a historical possibility, while a Soviet and/or socialist and/or secular Muslim is something of a contradiction in terms. For, *Homo-Islamicus* will always revert to a type under all circumstances and regardless of the nature and depth of the historical changes he may suffer or undergo.

We all know by now that neither *Homo-Islamicus* nor his supposed eternal dogmatic NO to secularism had anything to do with the demise of the USSR. The main components of the Union that opposed the center and brought it down were all Christian and in the European part of the empire. And while the minuscule Baltic Republics played the leading role in the break-up of the whole system (way out of proportion to their size and strength), the Muslim republics inclined to the last minute in the direction of saving the communist union. Even after its collapse, they did their best to attach themselves to its remnants, in spite of the neighboring models of revolutionary Islam in Iran and of armed insurrectionary Islam in Afghanistan.

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## **YEARS OF CHICAGO Forming A Soul\***

I prepared these remarks to pay homage to my teachers at the University of Chicago, to those of them who were members of the Committee on Social Thought during my student days in particular, but especially to John U. Nef, the founder, leading spirit, and first chairman of an institution conceived by him as an institute for the study of civilization. It would be rash of me to try and evaluate the scholarly work of these teachers or the range of their impact on their colleagues and many generations of students, but not perhaps rash to recall their impact on me as I listened to them during my student days and their impact on my work after I left the Committee on Social Thought. All this will necessarily be personal and anecdotal. Since I never managed to keep a diary, I am reduced to what I can now recollect across more than four decades.

If my memory does not fail me, the majority of the relatively few students enrolled in the Committee on Social Thought in the late forties, like students in other interdepartmental Committees in the Divisions of the Social Sciences and the Humanities, came or transferred largely from within the University of Chicago, having been students in what was known across the country as Hutchins' College, or else in one of the regular departments for a year or two. The Committee on Social Thought had been formed only a few

years earlier and was not particularly well known at the time, either nationally or internationally, except perhaps in France, a country particularly dear to John Nef. I belonged to those who transferred from the Department of Economics. I was only one of hundreds of foreign students who arrived to study at the University of Chicago that year as a result of a combination of some choices and a number of coincidences. Still, the story of a student from Baghdad who ended up in the Department of Economics and then transferred to the Committee on Social Thought perhaps deserves a brief account. At least, it may serve as an example of how this Committee offered one young man a unique opportunity shortly after the end of the Second World War to develop an interest that combined the rigor of the training offered by the specialized departments with broader concerns for the meaning of the past and the fate of humanity at large, in particular the fate of what was then called the underdeveloped world; then the third world, but for which a new name needs to be found now that the second world has collapsed.

Left to my own devices, I would perhaps never had anything to do with economics or the University of Chicago. My first choice after graduating from high school was to go to Cairo and study art history—Cairo and Beirut were university towns accessible to students from Baghdad in 1943; the war raging farther west excluded Europe and the United States. But family and community pressures decided that the only way for me to go abroad and be supported through many years of undergraduate and perhaps graduate studies was if I were to return with a degree in banking, and that meant agreeing to go and study at the American University of Beirut. In Beirut, I kept trying to evade that subject and devote as much time as possible to the study of philosophy. It was there that I first heard of the University of Chicago, due to the fame of its Department of Philosophy since the days of John Dewey and George Herbert Mead. Pragmatism was one of the types of philosophy we read

about in the book entitled *Types of Philosophy* by William E. Hocking. At the end of the second year as an undergraduate, I managed to convince my philosophy teacher to recommend to the Ministry of Education in Baghdad that I be allowed to study philosophy instead; but that recommendation was finally turned down by the British Adviser to the Minister of Education, a gentleman who thought he had the best interest of the nascent Kingdom of Iraq at heart and no doubt my own interest as well. So I completed the undergraduate studies and somehow received the proper degree, even though my heart and mind were largely occupied with philosophy and literature.

I was fortunate to have two outstanding teachers at the American University of Beirut notable for their knowledge and culture and for their ability to interest their students in the works of the mind. The first was the philosopher Charles Malik, who had been a student of Whitehead at Harvard and Heidegger at Freiburg i/Br. during the thirties and had a great gift of persuasion: listening to him convinced one that the pursuit of wisdom is the only pursuit worth living for. The second was the historian Constantine Zurayk, a historian of the Middle East during the Middle Ages, who had been a student of Philip K. Hitti at Princeton at the same time. On the basis of our performance at the end of the second year, a few of us were selected to lodge and eat together in a small house—called the Lodge—overlooking the Mediterranean Sea, where we were entertained by resident and visiting faculty, poets, and artists, who joined us for meals and stayed to converse and sometimes give formal talks after dinner. One of my friends at the Lodge and in the Philosophy Department, Hisham Sharabi, went to the University of Chicago immediately after graduation, while I spent the year 1947-1948 in Baghdad teaching and learning more about the country. When the opportunity to proceed with graduate study presented itself—again in banking, of course—I wrote to him, and it was he who sent me the admission documents. When I inquired whether anyone in Baghdad had

been to Chicago to study, I was directed to the archaeologist and student of ancient history, Fuad Safar, whom I visited in his office at the Iraq Museum: he spoke with affection and respect of the Oriental Institute as a great center for the study of ancient Near Eastern civilizations.

Travel from Baghdad to Chicago took much longer in those days, and I managed to extend it further by arranging to spend the summer in Paris on the way. As civil aviation had been reintroduced after the war, I was flown first to Cairo, having the opportunity to visit the pyramids of Giza for the first time and to spend the night there at the old Semiramis Hotel whose garden stretched all the way to the bank of the Nile. Then on to Marseille, but not without a refueling stop at Wheeler Air Base in Libya and another overnight stay in Malta. Then, after a third night spent in Marseille, there was a train ride to Paris, where I was met at the station by a younger friend from Baghdad, Husain Haddawy, who was later to make me famous by translating into English the medieval Arabic version of the *Arabian Nights* I was to edit. At the end of the summer, I had to proceed to London, then fly from there to some place in Scotland, where the BOAS plane which was able to provide travelers with rather comfortable canvas beds—went overnight to New York via two refueling stops: Shannon and Gander. From New York, I went first by train to Washington to meet friends and check with the Embassy, and then at last to Chicago.

Chicago was a long way indeed from Baghdad. Beirut at the time was still a sleepy provincial Mediterranean town. Paris was of course an exciting metropolis, yet grimy and lean, struggling to recover from the war. By comparison, the combination of energy, size, and prosperity made Chicago a very special city, projecting awe-inspiring power. The first impression of the University of Chicago campus in the fall of 1948, on the other hand, was exhilarating: it seemed majestic and serious looking, but with numerous inner gardens and next



to the vast open Midway; the austere aspect of the gray stone buildings was mitigated by the greenery both outside and inside the Quadrangles. The Midway and the surrounding neighborhood were thoroughly peaceful; one could walk through the neighborhood and the major parks at the two ends of the Midway at any time of day or night—and of course shop and eat on Sixty-third and Fifty-fifth streets, streets that were prosperous commercial thorough-fares—without fear or the sense of being in a deserted or decrepit neighborhood.

Upon arrival at the Midway I lodged first in International House, where Hisham Sharabi was staying at the time. This was an ideal place to meet students from many parts of the world—at the time from Europe, South America, and the Caribbean in particular—and from which to explore the university and the city of Chicago. I had applied to the Department of Economics, but was accepted in the Business School. So my first task upon arrival was to transfer to the Department of Economics, where I was immediately attracted to the lecture courses of the economic theorist Frank Knight, the economic historian Earl J. Hamilton, and John Nef, whose references to the Committee on Social Thought were my first introduction to his beloved institution.

Through Hisham Sharabi I was also introduced to the teachers he had known during the preceding academic year and went to hear them. They included the cultural historian Arnold Bergstraesser with whom I was to study cultural history, medieval German mysticism, Goethe, and Heidegger; later, I was to follow him to Freiburg i/Br. Richard McKeon, then Dean of the Division of the Humanities, was interpreting classical texts in Swift Hall. I recall especially listening to him read and comment on the first two books of Aristotle's *Politics* for the period of a whole Quarter, thus forcing one to read slowly and carefully and look for the way the author moved step by step in making his argument. I recall attending, as the Dean's representative, a doctoral examination many years later



where Richard McKeon, to my full satisfaction, tore a contemporary analytical dissertation to shreds. At the time I was not aware of the conflict between the "analysts" and the "historians" which had pitted Richard McKeon against John Nef. I was interested in both philosophic analysis—though not particularly in Richard McKeon's impressive schema—and in the philosophy of history, but was destined to join the historians' camp, partly because I was interested in the phenomenon of the transmission of philosophy across national borders and the role of contextual history in this process.

Then, in 1949, Leo Strauss arrived. In October of that year he gave the Walgreen Lectures that were later published as *Natural Right and History*, and he went on to lecture on the classics of political philosophy in the Department of Political Science, preaching the comforting thought that wisdom was to be sought among the Ancients, especially Plato and Aristotle; that things had been going downhill ever since; and that the world as we knew it was not going to last much longer due to the inevitable conflagration that was soon to come (it looked at the time as though nuclear war was imminent); yet we must go down fighting, that is, knowing ourselves and the truth of our past. Strauss's Walgreen Lectures began with what seemed to me at the time a savage attack on Max Weber and Martin Heidegger, the main gurus of modern social science and philosophy with whom I was just beginning a slight acquaintance. This was followed by conversations in the tearoom in the Social Science Building where I learned that he was acquainted with Ibn Khaldun's major work on the manuscripts of whose writings I had been working at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris the summer before. But I had no idea at the time that, while still in Europe, he had written rather extensively on Arabic—both Islamic and Jewish—philosophy during the Middle Ages. This was followed by a tutorial on the *Leviathan*: somehow I was hunted by him, even though it was some time before I had the

opportunity to attend his seminars on a regular basis and work closely with him on my dissertation. I must admit that the only reason I later returned to the University of Chicago to teach was to be close to him for a while longer. Then Iraqi politics took a new turn and I was stranded away from home for good.

In the meantime, I was reveling in what I was hearing from my teachers at the Committee on Social Thought especially David Grene on Greek literature, Yves Simon on medieval philosophy, Otto von Simson on medieval architecture, and of course John Nef—from whom I learned the meaning of commitment to searching for whatever truth was communicated throughout the Western tradition from the classical Greeks to the moderns. But it would be a mistake not to emphasize the importance of the University of Chicago as a whole, which provided the broader context. The Committee on Social Thought did not exist in isolation. The enormous strength of the graduate divisions and departments—especially and more immediately those in the social sciences and the humanities—the innovative College, the towering and stimulating presence of Robert Hutchins as Chancellor, as well as the enormous energy displayed by the city of Chicago—its no nonsense, hardworking spirit. What made the Committee on Social Thought such a wonderful place to study was its location at the heart of such a great university and such a great city. And John Nef, who was trying to articulate the new form of "specialization" at which the Committee on Social Thought aimed, knew from experience that the new spirit he was trying to encourage could only flourish in close relation with the progress and quality of the specialized studies which, he was the first to admit, would have to continue to be the norm, even though he was constantly arguing against their domination if not their tyranny. Nor was everything taught in the regular departments the old fashioned form of specialization. Hutchins had seen to it that there was a certain mixture of the old and the new, the very specialized and the interdisciplinary.

the conservatives and the rebels.

The faculty of the Committee on Social Thought consisted of a group of rather intense personalities who exhibited an almost religious fervor—regardless of whether they were for or against formal religion. The joke went around that the University of Chicago was a place where Jewish faculty were preaching Thomas Aquinas's philosophy to Protestant students. But one was struck with the importance of the Middle Ages, its literature, art, and philosophy. I never knew how credible were the rumors of conversion to Catholicism. No one was ever rumored to have been converted to Judaism, Islam, or Protestantism, to say nothing of Hinduism, but conversion to Catholicism, secret or overt, was something one was not surprised to hear about, which I assume was a sign of a religious awakening of sorts. Joachim Wach was teaching Indian religions in the Divinity School. But there was no cause for alarm about the faith of students in the Divinity School, since Wach was quick to explain that the study of other religions presented no threat to Protestant theology. India, which was later to be domesticated by the social sciences, was not felt as a threat to established religion. In any case, the Romantic study of the Orient during the nineteenth century had not led to conversion to Hinduism, but back to the Middle Ages and to Catholicism, exemplified in Friedrich Schlegel's conversion. John Nef used to refer to Henry Adams's *Mont Saint Michel and Chartres* with particular affection.

Hand in hand with the return to the Middle Ages was the effort to return from the Oriental Renaissance of the nineteenth century to the first Renaissance, signalled by the publication of *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man* by the University of Chicago Press. There was a tendency to abolish the Romantic-Oriental Renaissance, return to the seventeenth/eighteenth-century and to the original Renaissance, and re-establish the pre-eminence and uniqueness of the Greco-Latin world as the true source of the Western humanistic

tradition. John Nef's work at the time lay emphasis exclusively on the West, as he was only too willing to confess. But the Committee on Social Thought allowed and encouraged students interested in so-called non-Western studies: the Islamic world, India, China, Japan. Still, it appeared that there was an attempt to center attention on the Western world. Judaism and Christianity may have been seen as a parallel tradition, or even as a second source of the Western tradition that may not have been quite compatible with the first, but that other tradition was eventually reinterpreted through the late Greco-Latin tradition, a reinterpretation that reached its full flowering in Aquinas and the Middle Ages—that is, the synthesis of the original Greek (Aristotle) and the original Neoplatonic reinterpretation of Judaism (Christianity). However this may have been, what is true is that the University of Chicago's faculty in the Social Sciences and the Humanities Divisions, with a few exceptions such as the Sinologist Herrlee Creel, was almost wholly a Western oriented faculty, with the Oriental Institute seeking the roots of the Old Testament and the New Testament, and of Greece, in the ancient Near East.

The University of Chicago was known at the time, and may still be for all I know, as the hotbed of the Great Books curriculum. They were, of course, the great books of the Western world. Some questions may have been raised regarding some of the particular books included or excluded from the list of these great books, but never about their being exclusively books of the Western world. This had the advantage of encouraging students to go deeper into what is known or things related to what is known, of what is significant rather than what is novel or strange. There were no unknown civilizations to discover or unknown languages to decipher in these great books. One had the impression that the important works of the mind were already there, edited and translated, and that the work that remained to be done was to understand their message, discuss it, and learn its implications for life. One ought to

remember perhaps that by the late forties Japan lay prostrate before General MacArthur; China was slipping behind its own curtain; the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe were going behind the Iron Curtain and toward the denial of their cultural past; India had just emerged as an independent country after a long period of subjugation to the ideas of Macaulay and his friends—200 years of westernization had left it a pale image of itself. There was little competition with the Western tradition at the time.

As for the general course of Western civilization, one got the impression that it had its great moments in the past: the Greeks, the Middle Ages, and the seventeenth century. Since then, there was decline and departure from the heights it had reached earlier. Thus there was the need for return. Leo Strauss gave a series of lectures under the title "Progress or Return." T. S. Eliot and Jacques Maritain were for return also. Yves Simon and Otto von Simson, and eventually John Nef, were models of Catholic sobriety. No one was preaching the doctrine of progress any more. The possibility of progress was understood—as the ancients understood it—to be confined to technical matters and inventions in such things as industry and medicine. The further back one went into the history of Western civilization, the more unity could be discerned: in seventeenth-century France, in the cathedral of Chartres and the works of Aquinas, in classical Greece. Coming out of a World War that had torn the Western world asunder, one was particularly interested in what allows human life to hang together, in what makes for unity rather than what makes for difference and leads to conflict. What tears societies and individuals apart was not of much interest. One worked on an Encyclopedia of Unified Sciences, on a Syntopicon that listed the main ideas in the Great Books, on a constitution for a world community. Nineteenth-century Romantic thought was alive in the special concern and reverence for the European Middle Ages; in the study of French cathedrals and German mysticism;

in the renewed interest in theosophy and alchemy; and in the renewed interest in a new world political system (Giuseppe Borghese's seminar on Dante). The high Middle Ages were reclaimed as "classical."

This, then, was the general mood at the University of Chicago and to some extent in the Committee on Social Thought as well. If there was an ideology concerning the rest of the world, it was perhaps best expressed by Arnold Toynbee. After listening to one of his lectures in the seminar room on the third floor of the Social Science Building, I asked him as we were taking the elevator about the prospects for the rest of the world, the so-called Oriental peoples. His answer was that the only hope was through their adopting Western civilization. Toynbee, one must remember, was heir to a point of view developed in England during the nineteenth century when the Anglicists gained the upper hand over the Orientalists in running the affairs of the East India Company and of India.

The great books of the Western world could be read and discussed without any need to know the original languages in which they were written. This was partly a practical question, for hardly anyone could be expected to acquire expert knowledge in all the languages in which these books were written; and yet an educated person was supposed to be acquainted with these books. The original language was certainly useful and necessary for original, creative work. It was useful for checking translations, crucial terms, or particular concepts. In general, however, or for the sake of liberal education, works were read in translation. The language in which the author wrote was not thought indispensable for studying or understanding his argument, or even enjoying the art of his writing—provided one realized that one was looking at the original through a screen. This was the great books tradition. The notion of a "masterpiece," which had lost much of its uniqueness during the nineteenth century, and especially during the first part of the twentieth, due to the thought that it

was relative to the period and conditions in which it was written, was thus reinstated. There could be only so many great books, an argument supported by the notion that life is short and one had to choose. The Fundamentals in the Committee on Social Thought, the only common preparation that all students had to undergo, was related to the great books tradition; and it usually included some of the works in the canonical great books of the Western World. But it was quite flexible, and arguments could be made for including works outside the canon. In my case it had to include Gibbon, but to make up for the length of the *Decline*, it also included T.S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*.

Attention centered on what were called the great works of the mind, which I believe meant, apart from the great books, the great works of art—architecture, sculpture, and painting. No one was studying archaeology or popular culture, and no one dared to correct or modify the content of the great books through the findings of archaeology or mythology, or was allowed to relativize them in any way. It was as though they were pure reason or revealed truth; and the only appropriate task was to find out what they were saying, what they were really saying, what they were truly saying. This encouraged students to confront these works directly and make a serious effort to understand what their arguments were about. There was the ever-present question about the context, social and cultural background, and so forth of the author one read; but these remained for the most part unanswered or unanswerable questions. It was argued that the authors of these great books had a better understanding of the social and cultural context of their works than anyone could ever hope to gain from modern archaeology and social science, which tend to reconstruct such social and cultural contexts, and that such reconstructions are not quite reliable.

The faculty of the Committee on Social Thought, rather small compared to that of a major university department, could be easily distinguished from most other faculty. It was easy to



feel their personal commitment and involvement in the subjects they were studying and teaching, as if its exposition and understanding constituted their lives, the cause to which they had devoted themselves. No one presented himself as merely an expert, a master of a new technique, a teacher of a special method, or a person who had any reserve about, or kept his distance from what he was teaching. None of them attempted to attract large numbers of students through studied rhetoric. Nor, of course, did any of the use works of other contemporary writers as textbooks, a word mentioned only to be sneered at. By and large, classes consisted of analysis and interpretation of the classics, or else listening to a faculty member reading part of his current writing, a draft of a forthcoming book. This was a natural transition for me when I later went to Freiburg i/Br. and witnessed professors come in, ascend the podium, open a manuscript, proclaim "Meine Damen und Herren," and plunge into their manuscripts—only to stop at the ringing of the bell, even though they may have been in the middle of one of those long learned sentences. In some cases, it was as if the effort to explain a particular subject matter meant everything—was truly what mattered for human life and the future of civilization. Some were serene; others exhibited signs of inner tension; none was putting on a show. Noble inquisitiveness is what characterized the attitude of the faculty, compared to the proud indifference that was the pride of the great teachers in many departments. The dominant passion in the Committee on Social Thought seemed to give meaning to the hard labor of scholarship, and the combination of the passion and hard labor made a life devoted to study and reflection meaningful and worth living. There was no nit-picking, no dusting off old objects and books. The model presented by our teachers in the Committee on Social Thought was that of simply doing what was worthwhile rather than paying attention to scholarly fashions. This applied also to text editing, translation, criticism, and historical synthesis. Above all, there was a common



passion for, and delight in, the analysis and interpretation of important books and works of art.

The Committee on Social Thought paid particular attention to style, and one slowly learned to distinguish between various types and levels rhetoric and of the rhetoric of inquiry. Bad writing was discouraged, if not forbidden; and writers not known for classical styles were not mentioned in good society. The only time I recall hearing about Plotinus was in a lecture by Yves Simon's friend and colleague from Paris, Olivier Lacombe, a Sanskrit specialist who came to lecture on Plotinus and Indian thought; and he did not seem to despise his Asiatic connection or the contamination with Indian mysticism. (The first volume of the *Enneads* in the Loeb Classical Library was not published until 1966, and it was not until 1988 that the last volume appeared, indicating how slight the demand had then been among Anglo-Saxon students of the Classics for this kind of style, or thought, for that matter. The Latins were similarly neglected as late comers.) Here our teachers' styles, written and oral, were decisive, even though in some cases we had to strain ourselves to follow their foreign—German, Italian, or French—accents.

As students we learned to overcome the common temptation of following the latest fashion in the social sciences or in the humanities. The fact was that we had two homes: the specialized department or departments and the Committee on Social Thought. In the department one learned to be methodical and to gain access to all the necessary research instruments, source material, latest discoveries in the field, as well all the most advanced approaches to it; while in the Committee on Social Thought one had to justify a particular pursuit in broader, humane terms, before teachers and friends who had no specialized knowledge of the subject matter. The criteria were: Is it worth doing? Are the results being communicated successfully to the nonspecialist? What is the relevance of the work to the current questions raised by the social sciences?

What is its place in the humanistic tradition?

Since none of the Committee on Social Thought faculty and hardly any of the students in that Committee were specialists in one's own field of study, one was constantly challenged to explain and justify the particular inquiry he was engaged in. What was its relevance to the broader concerns, intellectual or political, of the time? Did it contribute anything to the questions agitating the intellectual community here and now regarding such questions as relativism, progress, fact-value distinction, or historicism? Did it contribute anything to the questions being asked in other fields of inquiry? There was constant contact with the problems, difficulties, and questions raised in other fields of inquiry in the humanities and the social sciences—questions which students in more specialized departments may have taken for granted. Thus a student developed a lifetime habit of always being curious, open yet critical, about the emergence of new forms of inquiry in parallel fields of study, as well as friendships and memories that persisted after one left the Committee on Social Thought.

Then there were the university-wide public lectures that brought distinguished scholars, as well as practitioners of the arts, who spoke about the old and the new in all fields. There seemed to be quite a few of these public lectures—given as individual lectures or as lecture series—each Quarter. They took place in large halls and seemed to be always overcrowded with eager listeners, and what was said in them was discussed later on in seminars and small groups. This was an opportunity to be acquainted with what the University of Chicago faculty at large was engaged in and to hear distinguished foreign visitors and nationally known figures. The Committee on Social Thought, in the person of its Chairman, John Nef, contributed to this activity by inviting the "nonspecialized" lecturers, including a number from abroad whom he hosted during their visits to Chicago. I recall especially the opportunity to listen to and talk with T. S. Eliot and Marc Chagall, whom he had

known in Europe.

It is hard to think of the Committee on Social Thought during the forties and fifties without thinking of John Nef as its central figure. He had an angelic smile that never seemed to leave his face—unless he became angry, which was not very often—and a generosity of spirit that seemed to be second nature. Since he was a member of the Department of Economics, and I was encouraged to transfer to the Committee on Social Thought by colleagues he knew and whose judgment he trusted, such as Earl Hamilton and Arnold Bergstraesser, the transfer to the Committee on Social Thought was a relatively simple matter. I recall that Majid Khadduri, who was then Visiting Professor in the Department of Political Science, counseled me not to transfer to the Committee on Social Thought because I would have a hard time finding a job. This was true for the first year or so after my return to Baghdad, where no one was able to figure out what my degree was about. But Khadduri, who undoubtedly meant well, had no idea of my lifelong struggle to reach this point. It was John Nef, as Chairman of Committee on Social Thought, who later signed the letter recommending that I study economic history, which was accepted. And when the Iraqi Cultural Attaché who was later to be murdered in one of the sad developments of Iraqi politics—called on John Nef to inquire whether I was really doing economic history, John Nef must have assured him that I was doing economic history (no doubt as John Nef understood it at the time), and of the best kind at that. Once in the Committee on Social Thought, I was free to follow my own interests with the full support of the faculty, none of whom seemed to be interested in the question of my specialization or future job prospects. Since I had already decided to forgo the riches I may have acquired through the study of banking in favor of other riches, neither the question of my specialization nor the question of job prospects occupied my mind at the time.

One of the attractions of the Committee on Social

Thought was that it permitted me to drift in a number of directions until I could find my bearings. And I drifted for almost two years among the rich offerings throughout the university. The late forties and early fifties marked a period when Western culture was trying to heal its wounds, and the University of Chicago under Hutchins was trying to play a meaningful role in this process. One learned at the time, for instance, that Hutchins recalled that he read Goethe while in the trenches in France during the First World War. Under him, the University of Chicago had a close relation with the University of Frankfurt a/M., and we were fortunate to hear a number of visiting lecturers from Frankfurt: reading and interpreting the *Nibelungenlied*, discussing tolerance in the Middle Ages, or searching the sky for a mythical star, as did the historian of science Willy Hartner, whom I was fortunate to meet again in Paris and at Harvard. Internally, one of the advantages of the divisional structure—in the Divisions of the Humanities and the Social Sciences, in any case—was that there could be creative competition between the divisions. In our case, we could see that the social sciences were opening themselves to humanistic studies without much concern for specialization or division of labor. Indeed, one had the impression that the social sciences were trying to co-opt the humanities and hoping to rejuvenate them, if not set them on what was thought to be the right path. The humanities, on the other hand, were increasingly adopting research methods used in the social sciences. Thus, while work in the humanities was in some cases being forced in into the straitjacket of nineteenth-century philology and older social science (glorious as these were in their time), the social sciences were allowing the same disciplines to breathe fresh air. With its emphasis on tradition, poetry, and rhetoric, the Committee on Social Thought did the same for the social sciences.

Once I formulated the dissertation topic, I was inevitably drawn to the Oriental Institute. The Oriental Institute was

"Oriental" in the old or original sense: with concentration on Semitic languages and cultures. The region that interested the Oriental Institute was still largely the ancient Near East. There was little about India, China, or Japan, let alone Southeast Asia or Korea, or Central Asia, in the department associated with the Oriental Institute and known at the time, I believe, as the Department of Oriental Languages.

The Oriental Institute dealt with dead cultures, cultures that were no longer threatening, that did not talk back. The social sciences, on the other hand, tried to understand and communicate with living peoples, perhaps backward, decadent, or whatever, but still living. The social sciences opened the rest of the world to academic investigation through an approach that posed no danger for the self-understanding of modern Western science. They incorporated the rest of the world into their own scheme, with some willingness to modify and expand it; but it remained their own. Still, and within that scheme, one felt the presence of a certain sense of wonder, and the willingness to travel to the end of the earth and bear the hardships of living in strange and sometimes primitive societies, in order to collect the necessary information to prove certain hypotheses. (I recall a former colleague, a political scientist, telling the story of how when the time came to do field work for the dissertation at Harvard, a teacher gathered six of his students for a week-end in a summer place in Maine, where he told them: here is my hypothesis regarding development; each of you is to go to one of these six developing countries and do the necessary field work proving it.) American social science was and remains one of the glories of American higher education as far as Europeans are concerned. The University of Chicago's Social Science Building was, nevertheless, home to a number of teachers who saw through some of the pretensions and empty claims in the way the social sciences were studied at that time.

Hebrew, Arabic, and Chaldean remained the substance of Oriental studies from the Council of Vienna to the French

Revolution. At the Oriental Institute, these languages, as well as Greek and Latin, had become ancillary tools for the study of older, pre-Islamic languages of the ancient Near Eastern countries: Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Sumer, Iran. The passion for what is old pervaded much of the humanities. In the Committee on Social Thought, however, we read and interpreted Greek and Latin great books without much attention to ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, or Iran. More importantly, we read and interpreted Kant and Hegel and Schelling, even Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, without much concern for Hindu thought, which had been the rage of intellectual circles in Germany at the time of these authors and had shaped much of nineteenth-century philosophy. That contemporary thought owed much to nineteenth-century German philosophy we all knew, but not that nineteenth-century German philosophy may have had anything to do with Hindu thought. In this and many other senses we followed Spengler without acknowledging our debt to him: cultures were closed entities, and "influence" was a spurious concept. The classic work on early European economic history, Pirenne's *Mohammed and Charlemagne*, dealt not with the openness of the West to the rest of Mediterranean culture, but with a West that was closed upon itself as a result of the disruption of Mediterranean trade due to Muslim conquest. It is true that we listened to Toynbee lecture at the Committee on Social Thought, but on the whole we assumed a view of the world where cultures were isolated and tightly sealed from one another, dominated by a particular religion, spirit, world-view, or whatever. The Oriental world, to the extent that it was present in our minds, was known through its incorporation into nineteenth-century German Romanticism in the works of Goethe, Herder, the Schlegels, and Hegel.

Compared with the vast sweep of Spengler's and Toynbee's schemes, John Nef's historical inquiries appeared more specialized. He presented himself as a historian and critic of industrial civilization, arguing that its success made the

attainment of order, charm, and serenity more difficult to achieve. And he presented arguments showing that war did not, as some had claimed, contribute to human progress. He stressed the need to be free from the prevailing nationalisms and think of the service of humanity. This was the mood at Chicago at the time, as shown in the interest in the notion of world government. It was also a view I came across again later upon meeting Alexandre Kojève in Paris. One had the impression that the old concept of *humanitas* was being revived. John Nef started with the simple notion that we do not understand where we are and where we are going without historical knowledge, implying that the comparative studies of the present—the hallmark of the social sciences at the time—did not always lead to the requisite knowledge. To this he added the general notion of the interconnectedness of different aspects of what is called culture or civilization—arguing that economic history alone, his own specialty, was not sufficient. And he was able to account for the relative and historical without becoming a relativist or a historicist. The central issue for him was not specialization as against generalization, but how to transcend specialties without yielding to superficiality.

Listening to him year after year as we sat around the huge oblong table in the seminar room on the third floor of the Social Science Building, he impressed me as a more complete and genuine historian than the two philosophers of history whose work was then in vogue. He was a historian concerned with history pure and simple, with optimism and faith in the spirit of civilized humanity, for whom such terms as love, faith, and charity came naturally and did not sound contrived. Rather than rely on the methodological jargon current in much of the rest of the Social Science Building, he practiced a rare artistic concentration on the sources that led to what seemed seamless interrelations among the different aspects of history at particular times and places. He made no pretense to an overall theory of world history. Here was a historian who started from direct



contact with, and reflection on, the past through original source material rather than through the second-hand accounts of other historians. Like Earl Hamilton, John Nef began with insistence on ascertaining the relevant facts with scrupulous accuracy and on acquiring the ability to handle documents, monuments, and other types of source material, directly. His method, if a method it was, was not so much one of generalization, but—as I observed earlier—of concentration, a habit analogous to that of the artist who concentrates on a particular subject and reveals its nature or essence through such concentration. It reminded one of the importance of works of art, especially complex ones such as architectural monuments, for understanding the complex design of certain written works. Reflection and concentration on the work of great architects and painters seems to enable one to understand what concentration is and what it can produce. This concentration leads also to the intuition of relationships between different aspects of human history, just as it is an intuition of the meaning, message, and implications of the great works of the mind. It is a method that requires patience, time, absorption. Important thoughts do not necessarily emerge when one is at a desk, with the mind full of particular bits of information, but when the mind is emptied of these particulars, when taking a walk, waking up, looking at a building or a picture. Again, like the habit of the artist, this is a habit acquired through practice rather than by learning some general method. To observe such habits practiced by our teachers in their lecture courses and seminars was perhaps the core of what one learned while attending the University of Chicago.

I had to learn to practice this kind of concentration when studying Islamic philosophic works; for with some, no one had reflected seriously on their message and context since medieval times. In the scholarly field, I learned a great deal also from the practice of commentary on religious and philosophic texts. This was a long, hard, and not always relaxing exercise. More



relaxing and pleasant, especially because one could converse about it with friends in other fields of endeavor, was the experience of works of art and literature, particularly for someone like me who was not an art critic or a literary critic. Art and literary works have the great advantage of acting on the mind without resistance. The experience of the visual and literary arts can become the exemplar of the scientific treatment of history. Silently, one looks and listens and stores without verbalization—their logic makes contact with the logos that transcends linguistic particularization. One can look, read, enjoy, and dream. And the opportunity to be in Paris before, during, and after joining the Committee on Social Thought was crucial in this respect. It started when I first landed there on my way to Chicago, when I knew no French at all. Like a deaf person, I learned to concentrate on what I could see and grasp visually, while progressively becoming acquainted with the language and with classical and modern French theater. I am reminded in this context also of the Indian dancers Vashi and Veena, who came to Chicago in the late fifties. Vashi arrived at the beginning of the Fall Quarter, performed with his wife in Mandel Hall, and practically danced his way to a doctorate in Sanskrit—received, if I am not mistaken, by the end of the Spring Quarter of that same academic year. His ability to concentrate as dancer was translated to the ability to write an excellent dissertation in a very short time.

I say all this so that no one may get the impression that the faculty and students at the Committee on Social Thought were doing nothing more than reading and discussing the great books of the Western world, developing broad cultural syntheses from secondary studies, or specializing in general notions. At one point, as I was preparing to spend the summer in Europe, Earl Hamilton gave me a letter of introduction to the well-known French historian Fernand Braudel—at the time the leading figure of the *Annales* school. I had just come back from Basel and was full of Nietzsche when I went to see him. The

historian's profession, he said, is a *métier* like that of the carpenter: he needs to know his tools and how to handle the source material through long and intimate practice. Then he recalled how he and Earl Hamilton had spent twenty years engaged in research in the Spanish archives before writing their respective major works.

It was not easy to follow in the footsteps of these masters when studying Islamic culture, and those who tried to do so tended to slip. Only a few sources, topics, or monuments had been handled successfully by the masters of that branch of the historical sciences which dealt with Islamic civilization. The vast majority of the sources, documents, manuscripts, and archival materials was only partially catalogued and accessible; the rest remained difficult of access, with new material coming to light almost every day. For instance, only a small portion, and not the most important one, of the writings of the philosopher Alfarabi was known or published, for the most part in inadequate and unreliable editions. Anyone with some knowledge of the state of scholarship in Greek and Latin classics would have thought this field was still where those studies were during the Renaissance period: scholars travelling in search of manuscripts; having one's eye fall for the first time on an important philosophic manuscript whose existence was not recorded before or recorded only summarily; reading about a copy of a manuscript in a private or public collection in Teheran or Kabul or Tashkent and having to travel for half a year to see it, read it, copy it, and edit it—these are experiences that may sound mundane, but they are experiences that few students of the Greek and Latin classics can expect to have. One had a choice: either learn to have direct access to the sources and study and interpret them, or else turn to generating a synthesis on the basis of inadequate knowledge of the sources in imitation of the current practice in Western cultural history.

One of the ideas impressed on us by John Nef was that one way to meet the question of specialization was to

concentrate on a special topic that reveals a whole culture. Ibn Khaldun seemed at the time to lend himself to such a study. I had already been acquainted with Ibn Khaldun in college—a friend had presented me with a copy of his *Prolegomena* and I had written a paper on his life in an Arabic class at the American University of Beirut. But partly due to Earl Hamilton's suggestion, I went to look at the manuscripts of his works in Paris. I was fortunate to find that there were a number of printings of his major work as well as a French translation by De Slane, where the translator had made an effort to collate the main printed text by Quatremère with the manuscripts available at the Bibliothèque Nationale, which I in turn checked to a certain extent just to make sure that De Slane's collations were reliable and thorough. The main objective was an analysis of Ibn Khaldun's method and the interpretation of his relation to Greek and Muslim philosophers and to earlier Muslim historians; and this turned out to be, indeed, a special topic that led into a whole culture. It was also a study related to John Nef's work; for his lectures made me eager to learn how to go about revealing the connections between the evolution in different aspects of human life and to discover what lay behind such connections, that is, what principles covered the evolution of culture or civilization as a whole and for me "principles" meant philosophy, in this case philosophy of history. Here it was necessary to face historicism and relativism and positivism. Ibn Khaldun proved to be the "bridge" I needed between history and philosophy in its Greek and Islamic forms, just as John Nef's lectures proved to be the "bridge" between economic history and Ibn Khaldun.

However, when as a result of this work on Ibn Khaldun I determined that the main Islamic philosophic tradition originated with Alfarabi and that it was necessary to have a comprehensive view of his works and philosophy, the situation was quite different. Most of this philosopher's writings had remained in manuscript form, difficult of access, largely in

Turkey and Iran. They had to be located through extensive research into printed catalogues and in catalogues available only on location in the libraries where the manuscripts were deposited, sometimes buried under such revealing titles as "a treatise by Alfarabi," if not "a collection of philosophic treatises" without an author's name. So they had to be located, photographed, edited, and translated before being analyzed and interpreted. It was as though Aristotle were known only by the few logical treatises translated into Latin in late Roman times which happened to survive into the medieval period. Or, it was as if Plato were known only by the *Timaeus* and a few fragments from the other dialogues, before the Renaissance translations by Pico della Mirandola and others. I had to travel and have microfilm copies prepared on the spot. In Kabul, I had to call in a street photographer to make a copy of Alfarabi's *Summary of Plato's Laws* with a 35mm camera using microfilm film I had carried with me all the way from Chicago. In Istanbul, the photographer had to be bribed with extra microfilming film. In Teheran, however, I could not meet the photographer's desire to obtain x-rated American movie cassettes in exchange for the microfilms he prepared as state functionary.

Here again, what I had learned while studying the Gothic cathedral came in handy: not to shrink from learning about the various aspects of the work necessary to bring it to conclusion. Obviously, there was the question of choice and judgment as to the importance of the topic. But once it was decided which of the works were central, the work could begin in earnest. And it was at this stage that John Nef's and Otto von Simson's teaching turned out to be crucial: do not be afraid of being called a jack of all trades, do not be afraid to learn and practice a number of arts, if the subject matter requires it—in this case, being an Arabist, textual critic, translator, and interpreter at the same time. Alfarabi's works were thus pursued with the image of the Gothic cathedral or of seventeenth-century French cultural

history in mind. This happened to be acceptable and even admired in the profession; for there were a number of Orientalists at that time—Louis Massignon, Henry Corbin, and Helmut Ritter among them—who were engaged in the same type of multi-faceted work, and yet were able to free themselves from the confines of the philological-historical tradition of other Orientalists. In any case, I was taught to try and be responsible for every aspect of the work I was doing, even if this meant learning different crafts. I learned these first by example by examining the works of good craftsmen and then by practicing the craft myself. But it was only when working on an edition of the earliest surviving version of the *Arabian Nights* that I think I finally perfected this difficult art. This is where the Orientalist tradition came in handy. It did not impose on one restraints regarding the subject matter of one's work. One could be a professor of Arabic and do one's research in practically any subject matter or a combination of subject matters. So I was free to do what I planned to do in connection with Alfarabi or the *Arabian Nights* without anyone raising an eyebrow or asking for an explanation.

It is difficult to explain the impact of what one learns as a graduate student on his future career as researcher or teacher. I know I was greatly disappointed when I could not pursue my career as a teacher in Baghdad, which started with a lecture on economic history and John Nef's version of it at the College of Commerce and Economics. Later on, first at the University of Chicago and then at Harvard, I tried to encourage students to analyze and interpret philosophic and literary works in their first major written work—the doctoral dissertation—rather than principally accumulate data, edit texts, or translate them even though they were trained in all these helpful arts and had to use them in their studies—and discouraged the kind of dissertation on someone's "life and works" that was common at the time in other distinguished universities such as the University of Paris. Instead, I encouraged students to grapple with major thinkers

and literary works whose analysis and interpretation required concentration and training in the art of thinking and in the particular subject matter treated in these works, whether philosophical or literary. Also, I encouraged them to cross conventional lines and become conversant with the best traditions of philosophic and literary analysis, regardless of whether they happened to be popular at the time.

As a university, Harvard, perhaps even more than the University of Chicago, is particularly open to such ideas in the regular departments. The Graduate School of Arts and Sciences there is not divided into four Divisions as at the University of Chicago. It has never been very large or insistent on technical competence at the cost of liberal education and inventiveness. The departments are not as jealous of their prerogatives. And institutions such as the Junior Fellowship program allow for the kind of freedom and sociability that was encouraged by the Committee on Social Thought at the University of Chicago. Crossing departmental lines is easier for both students and faculty members, and not many special interdepartmental organizations are deemed necessary to accommodate student interest in what happens to be interdisciplinary. The individual faculty member—who has a more independent status there than in most other institutions of higher learning I know of—as thesis adviser has more of a say about how a student's work can or should be conducted. Of course, such a liberal system can have its disadvantages: lack of control, unevenness of standards (at Chicago, the committee that read the dissertation and approved it consisted of a larger number of instructors, the whole department was responsible for approving it, and the Dean of the Division sent a representative to the examination session to report to him on how the department behaved), tyranny of the individual faculty member, or else developing a soft spot for a student with whom one has dealt for many years or for the student's personal and family situation. But the relative independence of the adviser can also be used to allow a

graduate student to engage in novel and innovative approaches to the subject matter, without the need to pay much attention to how "science" or "scientific" is understood elsewhere in the field and sometimes even among one's colleagues. All this is partly due to the fact that neither Harvard nor the individual faculty member there needs to prove anything to anybody. Harvard is also more diversified with respect to the academic traditions from which it draws, being heavily British in addition to borrowing from the Germanic and other European traditions from which most graduate schools in the country acquire their faculty. Thus the pursuit of learned specialities in particular fields of inquiry can be pursued along with the kind of investigations encouraged by the Committee on Social Thought, in the same traditionally organized department without much friction, just as was possible in certain departments at the University of Chicago, such as political science and Oriental studies, all along. As for the students, at Harvard students are particularly grateful to be left alone and be directed by persuasion rather than inflexible rules.

All this is perhaps partly due to the so-called field that has come to be my own. For as a professor of Arabic, one needs to know some things like philology and history, but one can choose to specialize in any particular subject matter or group of subject matters. If one chooses to become or remain solely a philologist, one has two choices: either remain silent about any subject matter other than philology, or discourse on other subject matters without knowing what one is talking about, basing oneself on one's prejudices and using one's own culture as the measure. The difficulty is how to encourage students to be interested in a number of disciplines on their own terms and in their interconnections as well. Can one be equally interested in such things as philosophy, politics, and literature? Should students be encouraged to take advantage of interesting questions being raised in classical or medieval studies, in philosophy, as well as in literary theory? Can students be



encouraged to be inventive, to explore new fields of knowledge, to learn to write well, to resist purely technical competence or too narrow monographic studies?

On a personal level, I had learned from John Nef to be fully accessible to and supportive of graduate students, having known something of their struggles and difficulties, rather than remain aloof and skeptical of their worth. In fact, my memory of the Committee on Social Thought faculty on the whole was that there was nothing this faculty would not do to help its students or further their studies. The Committee on Social Thought consisted of a small and intimate group of teachers and students where the students had many opportunities to meet the faculty socially, in the homes of the faculty members or in their own homes, and the students had many opportunities to meet one another as well. The University of Chicago that I and my friends knew, but especially the Committee on Social Thought to which we belonged and whose faculty and spirit formed our souls during those years, was a safe and comfortable haven, full of warmth and energy, sparing nothing that might have benefited the intellectual development of those students whom the faculty considered as junior colleagues. At least this is the way I, and most of my contemporaries, remember, or ought to remember, those formative years we were privileged to be members of this extraordinary institution.

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*Taurus, an eighteen-century Arab miniature, from al-Qazwini's Wonders of the Creation*

## ORIGINS, BODIES, AND FOOTPRINTS

IN IBN TUFAIL'S *HAYY IBN YAQZAN*  
AND DEFOE'S *ROBINSON CRUSOE*

Exile and culture are antithetical concepts. Culture is the point of departure for an exile because one is exiled, first and foremost, from a culture; and culture is that which, to some extent, an exile always leaves behind. Culture in this sense is that "belongingness" which welds a disparate group of people into a society, that "binding" force Ibn Khaldun calls "assabiyya" and which he associates with the act of building walls around a city--an act articulating clearly and unequivocally where a people begin and where they end, where "we" live and where "others" live. Thus to be an exile means to be put outside the walls, to be divorced from one's people, one's community, to be made single, and, unavoidably, to be made isolated. Narratives of exile inevitably bring into sharp focus basic cultural attitudes which help not only to define what constitutes a given culture, but also to distinguish one culture from another. Narratives of exile on deserted islands, a radical and absolute form of exile, offer a particularly useful vantage point from which to examine those attitudes which rest deep within cultural formations.

Within Eastern Islamic culture and Western Christian culture there are two major narrative texts dealing with island exile: Abu Bakr Ibn Tufayl's *Hayy Ibn Yaqzan* and Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*. That these texts were written many

centuries ago by no means implies they are only of "historical" interest. They still constitute part of the modern cultural baggage which each culture carries forward. The narratives are simply too rich both textually and intertextually for this paper to attempt a thorough examination. Thus the following analysis will focus on a restricted set of concepts or aspects of exile common to each narrative: origins, bodies, and footprints.

## ORIGINS

Origins, what root us in the past and in history, are presented in both narratives as problematic. Ibn Tufayl gives us two versions of Hayy's birth and that very fact problematizes his origins. According to one he was born as a result of "spontaneous generation": the sun working on clay and other natural elements on a deserted island. According to the other he was the son of the sister of a king, "a wicked tyrant," of a neighboring island who secretly married a kinsman named Yaqzan against her brother's wishes. Fearing exposure of her marriage, she puts the child into a box, an "ark," casts him into the sea, and places him in God's care, praying:

Almighty God, you formed my baby when it was nothing, 'a thing without a name.' You fed him in the darkness of my womb.... In fear of that wicked tyrant I entrust him to your care (105).

A strong current from the sea then carries the ark to a deserted island.

These two versions of Hayy's origins are antithetically juxtaposed, as if, in the words of the narrator, his origin was a "mirror reflecting on itself" (167). In the one he is formed in dark cave of the womb; in the other he is formed in the light of day. In one he is born within a community, within secular time; in the other he is born outside of any community, on a deserted island, and outside of secular time which defines a

community's movement in history. The common ground between both of these origins is that they are "secret"--not from the reader, but from Hayy himself--and that both take place on an island. These two origins come together at the point where Hayy was found by a doe on the deserted island, who becomes his surrogate mother. Neither one of these versions is presented as preferable to the other. Together they form a balanced and stable equilibrium.

Crusoe's origins are equally, though quite differently, obscured. Crusoe's father was German, "a foreigner of Bremen," who emigrated to England and married an English woman called "Robinson"(1). His father's family name was "Kreutznaer"; "but," as Crusoe tells us, "by the usual corruption of words in England we are now called, nay, we call ourselves, and write our name 'Crusoe,' and so my companions have always called me"(1). Crusoe's name, a corruption of an original, is unstable and liable to change. The observation made by many readers that Crusoe is a universal representative of man, a person for whom every reader could substitute himself, reflects the fact that any name could represent him or that no name could represent for very long.

The process by which Crusoe receives his name does not involve "generation," but a systemic "corruption" of words. His name is not connected to any essence, but rather to that vocal sign by which others call him and by which he calls himself. That which will come to be Crusoe's name has, in effect, been detached from its origins and no longer "stands for" him so much as it is something by which to "call" him. The ease with which names are so corrupted is reflected in Daniel Defoe's decision to change his name from "Foe" to "Defoe" in order to have a name giving him more social "standing" in his community. Names in Crusoe's case are equally arbitrary, portable, and mutable.

For Crusoe, who moves from York, to Hull, to Yarmouth, to London, to North Africa, and to Brazil in the first

thirty pages of the narrative, the corruption of his "original" name is symptomatic both of manic flight from the past and of a relentless desire to re-originate or re-root oneself in the present. The son of a father who emigrated from Germany, exiled son of an exile, Crusoe is uprooted and transplanted, only to become uprooted and transplanted again. As a result, history for Crusoe is relentlessly discontinuous and fundamentally diachronic. It is this unceasing stream of sameness and difference to which Crusoe alludes when he asks by "what secret differing springs are the affections hurried about as differing circumstances present!":

Today we love what tomorrow we hate; today we seek what tomorrow we shun; today we desire what tomorrow we fear .... (132)

History under these conditions becomes not a continuous flow of events, but a sequence of disruptions; and these are reflected in the paratactic structure of events in the novel.

Born in "secular" and sequential time, Crusoe is able to point to his origins and is aware of his history; but sees both origins and history as shifting and mutable. Constantly in motion, his essence is marked by a central contradiction: the desire to be both rooted and rootless. Time for him is represented by those technologies of modern Western health--the treadmill or stationary bicycle--which seem to serve a need to be both furiously in motion, yet rooted in the same space. The narrative, a chronicle of his being always in flight, always escaping, is also a chronicle of his attempts to root himself in his present.

His sequence of "projects" on the island--the house, the wall, the crops, etc.--are virtually endless. This need to keep busy is symptomatic of the word he uses to describe the force that drives him through history: "hurriedness". He is afflicted, he tells us, by what he calls the "hurries of my soul" (80). Given

his instinct to flee from the past, going "home," back to his point of origin, is against his nature. "I had several times loud calls from my reason...to get home," he tells us,

yet I had no power to do it. I knew not what to call this, nor will I urge that it is a secret overruling decree that hurries us on to be the instruments of our own destruction, even though it be before us, and that we rush upon it with our eyes open. Certainly nothing but some such decreed unavoidable misery attending, and which it was impossible for me to escape, could have pushed me forward" (11).

On the last pages of *Robinson Crusoe*, Crusoe, having reached home, pushes off again on another voyage. Home for Crusoe becomes not so much a past origin as it is a place from which one must depart and which must be continually reconstructed in the present. He is not so much bound to any haven ahead as rushing from all havens astern.

For Hayy, despite a similar problematic of origins, the situation is quite the reverse. Where Crusoe's essence lies in the contradictory desire to be both rootless and rooted, Hayy's essence is reflected in a timeless balance of opposites. Hayy is both connected to his past; yet at the same time, and in a far more radical way, more disconnected than Crusoe.

Even though Hayy's connection to his past is abruptly severed when his mother put him to sea in the ark, the name "Hayy Ibn Yaqzan" is not a corruption. It represents not only his roots in history, but also his "essence"--"alive" and "aware." Crusoe's "hurriedness" undercuts any possibility of an essence. If we can say that Crusoe does have an essence, it lies in his ability to adapt himself to new conditions. But such an "essence" is in effect a denial of the possibility of essence. There can be no "true" name for Crusoe; and, doomed to that

unhappiness which Pascal says stems from the inability of men to sit quietly in their own rooms, he is the very agent of those changing conditions which he encounters.

Hayy's radical disconnection from history stems from the fact that, while he does have a "true" name, it is seen only by the eyes of the narrator and the reader. Hayy is not aware of what his true name is. Thus, while we know that he is connected to history, "Alive Son of Aware" is not aware of any name which links him to a past. Born both inside and outside of secular time, Hayy has no awareness of time as history. Unlike Crusoe, who marks passing days both in his journal and as notches on sticks of wood, time for Hayy is broken up into seven-year stages, like stops on a metro line, each representing a step on a path of progression. At each stage, Hayy solves a problem or masters a discipline.

Hayy's movement from one stage to another is progressive and irreversible. He does not return to a previous stage. What is "past" for Hayy is, thus, as useless as a used metro ticket; it simply has no value. It is not in the notion of "pastness" that constitutes secular time where Hayy finds value, but in a world of absolutes outside of history. For Hayy, the past, is simply trash—like those worldly possessions which he calls "the trash of this world" (163). Unlike Crusoe, Hayy needs no point of departure in history because his flight is not in secular time. Thus, when he tells Absal he has "no idea of his origins," and that he knows of "no father or any mother besides the doe that had raised him," there is neither sadness, nor desire to find his place in history (160).

There is no name by which Hayy needs to call himself or by which he needs to be called, and being "unnamed" is not something he fears. Given his circumstances, it is what he takes to be a natural condition. Unaware of his origins in history, he simply is what he is. For him essence and existence, like his two births, are simultaneous, neither proceeding the other.

## **BODIES**

Dealing with nakedness is a theme common to both narratives and in some ways inevitable for exiles on deserted islands. Robinson's clothes wear out, and Hayy is exiled without clothes. Each must choose whether or not to clothe themselves; both decide that it is necessary. They must then choose the "fashion" in which to cover themselves: the material and the "style". Clothes, a statement of the wearer's relation to a community and to history, reveal something of that unclothed "essence" they are meant to cover. Hayy and Robinson reflect essential differences in the fashion each chooses to cover their nakedness.

Hayy feels "deficient" in that the private parts of animals "were better concealed than his own [which disturbs] him greatly" and makes him "very unhappy" (110). To remedy the deficiency, first he seeks to cover himself by clothing made of "some broad leaves from a tree":

But he had hardly worn it at all when the leaves withered and dried and, one by one, fell out. So he had constantly to get new ones and work them in with the old in bundles. This might hold it up a while longer, but still it lasted only a very short time (110).

Leaves, subject to decay and corruption, will not provide a lasting remedy for his nakedness. Then he finds a dead eagle and cuts off "the wings and the tail just as they were, all in one piece;" "He stretched out the wings," the narrator tells us:

and smoothed down the feathers, stripped off the remaining skin and split it in half, tying it about his middle, hanging down, half in front and half behind. The tail he threw across his back; and he fastened the wings to his arms. Thus he got a fine



covering which not only kept him warm but also so terrified the animals that not one of them would fight with him or get in his way. In fact, none would come near him again except the does that had nursed and raised him (111).

Hayy, who as a child sleeps "among the feathers with which his little ark had been cushioned" (109), rejects a covering for his nakedness rooted in the earth and subject to decay; as his second skin he chooses the "skin" of a creature of the air.

Where Hayy is an "aerial" creature, Crusoe is clearly shown to be a creature of the earth. Once his "civilized" clothes decay, he covers himself with the skins of an animal of the earth, a goat. The goat whose skin Crusoe chooses, like the trees which Hayy finds unusable, is "rooted" in the earth. When Crusoe enters a cave, his deepest penetration into the island, a place which will become the inner sanctum of his fortress/home, he sees "two broad shining eyes of some creature, whether devil or man [he] knew not" (159). The eyes belong to a dying "most monstrous, frightful, old he-goat" which Crusoe "inters" in the floor of the cave (161).

In their respective choices of clothing, Crusoe and Hayy are in antipodal opposition. Crusoe, clothed in the skins of an animal of the earth, displays a distinct aggression towards things of the air. Hayy clothed in the skins of an animal of the air, displays a similar aggression towards the things of the earth.

The first bird Crusoe sees on his island he shoots with his gun. "I had no sooner fired," he says:

but from all the parts of the wood there arose an innumerable number of fowls of many sorts, making a confused screaming, and crying...; but not one of them of any kind that I knew. As for the creature I killed, ...its flesh was carrion, and fit for

nothing (81).

With the exception of a parrot, whom he domesticates and teaches to speak, birds become a major competitor. They attack his grain and when they do, his response is immediate. "I... killed three of them," he tells us:

This was what I wished for; so I took them up, and served them as we serve notorious thieves in England, viz., hanged them in chains, for a terror to others;...they forsook all that part of the island, and I could never see a bird near the place as long as my scare-crows hung there (104).

For Crusoe, that ultimate consumer, whose greatest fears are to be eaten by cannibals or to not have enough to eat, these "birds [which] would devour all [his] hopes" (104), represent the gravest of threats. The only good birds for Crusoe are either dead birds, or birds that have been humanized by being taught to mimic human speech.

Hayy's antipathy towards the things of this earth is reflected in his response to the death of his surrogate mother, the doe. When she dies, he cuts into her body with a knife, seeking to discover the reason for her death. When the body starts to decay, the narrator tells us that it gives off "dreadful odors increasing his revulsion for it":

He longed not to have to look at it. Not long afterwards he noticed two ravens fighting. They fought until one struck the other dead, whereupon it scratched a hole in the earth and buried the dead one. ...So he dug a hole, threw in his mother's body, heaped earth upon it, and went back to thinking of what controls the body (115).

The same knife is taken to other beasts of the earth. "He got hold of a beast," the narrator tells us, "tied it down and cut it open, as he had the doe, and reached the heart. ...He followed this up by dissecting and vivisectioning many animals...." (117).

Hayy's burial of his mother, an action learned from the birds of the air, is not a farewell; it is a dismissal, an interruption in his investigation of what "controls the body". Hayy's taking of a knife to the doe who was his mother in order to find out what has caused her death is not merely a symbol for the cutting edge of reason; it is also a desire to sever oneself from the earth as mother, to detach oneself from things which are rooted in time and subject to decay. The abruptness of the burial is a reflection of Hayy's disrupted origins.

Here again for Hayy, what is past is simply trash which one buries in the earth; and, a creature of the sky, an "aerial" being, the past has no value for him. But for Crusoe, who continually scavenges that detritus which washes up on his island and whose possession of it allows him to dominate his environment, the "trash of the world" has a clear and definite value. The past his society leaves in its wake as it steams into the future has value not only as providing a means of domination, but also as a point of departure in secular time, as that from which he is always escaping. The past, society's detritus, serves to enable and define his present, his being in the world; and it is his presence on and in the earth where his attention is focused.

For Hayy, a creature whose nature is to rise, the sun is a "divine" light. But for Crusoe, who burrows in the earth, the sun is something to be avoided. Just as his grain needs to be protected from birds of the air, so the hat and the umbrella of goat skin which Crusoe fashions are intended to protect him from the light and heat of the sun. Without his hat, Crusoe tells us, "no more could I ever bring myself to go out in the heat of the sun":

The heat of the sun beating with such violence, as it does in that place, would give me the headache presently, by darting so directly on my head, without a cap or hat on, so that I could not bear it; whereas, if I put on my hat, it would presently go away (121).

In the burial of the doe his mother, Hayy covers up that which, because it is dead, comes to have no value for him. In covering his head, the seat of his reason and his earthly body, Crusoe covers that which is most valuable.

That Crusoe buries the goat found in his cave with more reverence than Hayy buries his mother reflects different values given to man's place in history and secular time. The dead are "history," and as history they are useless to Hayy. They are not part of his community. Hayy has a "true self" outside of history which will never die. Hayy's body is but a tool and his "true self," the narrator tells us, "could not perish":

[Hayy] desired to know what [true self's] fate would be once it had freed itself of the body and left it behind. Clearly this being would not abandon the body until no further use could be derived from it as a tool. (136)

For Crusoe, while the bodies of others may have value as tools or commodities, his body is never a tool; it is the seat of his being. Its preservation is his constant concern, evidenced not only in his fear of being eaten but in his manic drive to provide food for it to eat. For Hayy, because "sense objects are veils blocking out such experience [of God]" (143), the tool that is his body should be fed "only enough to stave off hunger" (145). He reaches a point where "sometimes days could pass without his moving or eating" (148). But Crusoe, who is doomed to run through history, piles up the things of this

world, resolving "to have two or three years' corn beforehand, so that, whatever might come, [he] might not perish for want of bread" (140).

Hayy's orientation towards an aerial and timeless realm of essences and Crusoe's towards chthonic, secular and diachronic time is also reflected in where and how he views the stars. The stars, Hayy tells us, are beings who have "identities" or selves. Being "far above all change and decay," they reflect what is timeless and enduring—qualities which Hayy values most. He feels they are "neither physical nor imprints on anything physical"(139), and he spends long periods contemplating them. But Crusoe, looking backwards and downwards, never appears to look up. And despite long years of exile on the island, not once does he mention viewing the stars above. The only stars which Crusoe sees are buried deep in the earth, the "two broad shining eyes of some creature ... which twinkled like two stars" in a cave whose walls "reflected one hundred thousand lights" from the light of his candle (159). This light he assumes comes from those earthly things which his secular society has endowed with absolute value: "diamonds," "precious stones," or "gold" (160).

### FOOTPRINTS

Radical forms of exile are constituted by the most radical forms of isolation, the root meaning of which is captured by the Latin word "insulatus" (from which the English word "isolate" comes): "insulatus" means literally "to be made into an island." Island exile is the antithesis of community; and the island, a bit of land surrounded by an endless sea, is an icon of isolation. To be on a "deserted" island means to live on an "I-land," a land populated by a single ego living in absolute isolation from its original cultural setting and from any community. Thus, it is not surprising that the word "deserted," and "desert" have their roots in the same Latin word, "deserere"—the opposite of that social binding force which Ibn

Khaldun calls "assabiyya"--meaning to "un-bind," to "sever one's links with." Deserted islands are defined not on the basis of what characterizes them, but by what does not; by what it is lacking, what is absent. Being in a place where what is absent is more compelling than what is present, the deserted island inevitably becomes a place of desires; and because the deserted island represents the absolutely unfamiliar, all that which is not "home," it is also a place of fears.

Crusoe often laments the absence of another as he does when not one person survives a ship wrecked against the rocks of his island. "Such were these earnest wishings that but one man had been saved!" he tells us:

"Oh that it had been but one!" I believe I repeated the words, "Oh that it had been one!" a thousand times; and the desires were so moved by it, that when I spoke the words my hands would clinch together, and my fingers press the palms of my hands, that if I had had any soft thing in my hand, it would have crushed it involuntarily; and my teeth in my head would strike together, and set against one another so strong that for some time I could not part them again (169).

Here we see in Crusoe a fundamental ambivalence towards the other, the conflict in him between desire and fear. At the very moment of expressing the desire for another, his body betrays him. His teeth make a biting movement; his hands become instruments to rend and tear. Crusoe references this instinct to bite and to rend in another passage when he wonders how he would have acted he had been unable to salvage items from the ship wrecked on his island:

I should have lived, if I had not perished, like a mere savage; that if I had killed a goat or a fowl,

by any contrivance, I had no way to flay or open them, or part the flesh from the skin and the bowels, or to cut it up; but must gnaw it with my teeth, and pull it with my claws, like a beast. (207)

This beast with teeth that bite and claws that rend which Crusoe fears to become is always with him, just under the surface. It is his second self, his secret sharer and constant companion. Hayy too has a beast within; "dull and dark," it belongs "to the world of generation and decay" (142). It demands "sensory things of him—food, drink, intercourse" (142). But Hayy's beast does not live in his present; it is already past and relegated to what he calls "the lower half of his body" (142).

Crusoe gives us a dramatic presentation of that inherent hazard of exile: madness and unreason. And Crusoe's beast, or Crusoe as beast—dark, chthonic, and inarticulate—who struggles in the present with that rational and pragmatic self who is also Crusoe, is symptomatic of a madness associated with exile under conditions of isolation: schizophrenia. In its benign form schizophrenia is the condition of "talking to oneself". This Crusoe does continually. When he must make a decision or come to a conclusion, he tells us that he "[calls] a council, that is to say, in my thoughts" (47), or converses "mutually with my own thoughts" (122), or enters into "the utmost debate" with himself (144). In its acute form it is the madness resulting from an inability to integrate two opposed selves within a single psyche. For a man who tells us that he has repeated the words "Oh that it had been one!" a thousand times, talking to oneself is a strategy to avoid dealing with a more fearsome division within. Crusoe, as we have argued earlier, is divided against himself; and the division is reflected not only in the conflict between being both rooted and rootless, but also in the conflict between Crusoe's beast and Crusoe himself.

Crusoe so strongly feels the need to hear a voice whose source is outside of himself that he teaches a parrot he captures how to speak; and when it finally is able to say "Poll," it is "the first word [he] ever heard spoken in the island by any mouth but [his] own" (106). He built communities to provide the illusion of others; but the desire to have someone to talk to is undercut by his need to dominate; and the communities which he establishes on his island, are really communities of one, communities in which only Crusoe has a "voice".

One he constructs, for example, is composed of animals: the parrot, whom he has taught to speak, his dog, and two cats. "I was lord of the whole manor," he tells us,

...I might call myself king or emperor over the whole country which I had possession of. There were no rivals. I had no competitor, none to dispute sovereignty or command with me. ...I had the lives of all my subjects at my absolute command. I could hang, draw, give liberty, and take it away; and no rebels among all my subjects. (204)

This community bears Crusoe's stamp. It is dominated by a single individual, sole owner of the state with absolute authority over all inhabitants. There are no competitors, no rebels. Crusoe who expresses such strong desires for a companion instinctively creates relationships of domination; and the parrot who is meant to provide the sense of conversation speaks only those words which Crusoe has given it. One part of Crusoe desires a companion; the other domination. The result is a parody of community; one dominated by a single voice.

The "others" which Crusoe has created with whom to talk and share community are merely versions of himself, outer manifestations of his own inner drama. When Crusoe discovers



the footprint, the situation changes dramatically. Crusoe, who has put his own stamp on the island, who sees the island as his to mark, has found the mark of another. His reaction is terror and flight: "never frightened hare fled to cover," he tells us, "or fox to earth, with more terror of mind than I to this retreat" (139). He adds another wall to protect his manor. Now he has "a double wall ...with pieces of timber, old cables, and everything I could think of, to make it strong" (144-5). Crusoe, who has to know the name of things, has found a thing without a name. His instinct is to name it. First, he tells us, "it must be the devil" (139); then he thinks it might be himself, "only the print of [his] own foot" (142).

Hayy's birth is the occasion for departure from a community dominated by the single voice of a wicked tyrant. The community of deer in which he grows up as the surrogate child of the doe is more "natural" than Crusoe's constructed communities in the sense that its is based on a social organization found in nature. In this natural community his surrogate mother leads, "gently and tenderly," and he follows her "to where fruit trees [grow] and [she feeds] him the sweet ripe fruits":

She brought him to water when he was thirsty, and when the sun beat down she shaded him. When he was cold, she warmed him, and at nightfall she brought him back to the spot where she had found him, nestling him to herself among the feathers with which the little ark had been cushioned" (109).

This is a community based on dependencies, on service, not on control, power and domination. Unable to provide for himself and thus dependent on others, Hayy is served by the doe who is in fact more powerful than him.

Rather than being, like Crusoe, a namer of things and a giver of language to those who speak unknown tongues, Hayy, having no language of his own, learns how to "speak" the language of the community of deer, "imitating their calls so well that eventually his voice and theirs could hardly be

distinguished" (109). In the same way, he learns to speak the language of the wider community of animals on the island, imitating "all bird calls and animal cries he heard with amazing accuracy" (109). His assimilation within it is made easier by the fact that, unlike Crusoe, he has no other terms of reference for what a community should be. He sees himself as one of many; Crusoe sees the many as one.

In Hayy's community there is struggle and there are competitors. Like Bedouin communities, Hayy's first community is one in which all the members are armed and "mounted." He sees how swiftly the animals "could run, how fiercely they could fight, and what apt weapons they had for defense against any attacker--horns, tusks, hooves, spurs and claws" (110). Seeing that he is "a weak runner and not a good fighter" and that "when the animals grappled with him for a piece of fruit they usually wrested it from him and got away with it" (110), Hayy realizes that he is different. Because he has no natural defenses, he develops his concept of the other in terms of a difference which sets him apart from other members of his community. Thus he discovers that in his entire community there is no other animal "at all like himself" (110). When he searches the island for some being like himself, "he [finds] none." When he sees his island surrounded by the sea, he believes "his island was the only land there was" (115). Where Crusoe defines the other as that which is not similar to himself, Hayy sees himself as that "other" who is not similar to members of his community. These two views of "otherness" are really two different types of exile: Hayy becomes an exile within a community and Crusoe an exile without.

Because Hayy sees himself as the only one of his kind and his place as the only place, he neither fears nor desires the arrival of another from outside his world—his world has no "outside"—and thus does not suffer Crusoe's agonized and contradictory anticipation of the other. A being who sees himself as unique, who does not anticipate the arrival of an

other, cannot be caught in the opposition between fear and desire, anticipation and revulsion, which punctuates Crusoe's responses. Hayy is neither a being of contradictions like Crusoe, nor does he see himself as one. Even though his "identity seemed complex and multiform," all of the parts of it "were connected and contiguous"(119). Unlike the disequilibrium of contradictory elements in Crusoe, the different elements within Hayy's self were in the "stablest equilibrium" (140). Hayy could, of course, like Crusoe, have defined himself as the center of his universe, as a naked Cartesian ego; but his experience in a community marked by dependency and competition among equals does not prepare him for such a posture. Where Hayy seeks to find his place in the only world he knows, Crusoe seeks to make the world his place only.

Hayy resembles Crusoe when the very experience which brought Hayy to recognize his "otherness" leads him to see himself as "superior". Even though he has no natural defenses, he finds that he can invent them. For both Crusoe and Hayy necessity is the mother of invention, and both develop a sense of superiority because they can invent that which they lack under the pressure of necessity. Thus, Hayy's self-esteem rises as he observes

how superior his hands were to those of an animal. They enabled him to cover his nakedness and to make sticks for self-defense, so he no longer needed natural weapons or the tail he had longed for (111).

Crusoe's sense of superiority leads him to physically dominate that world where he finds himself, Hayy's leads him to try and understand it. Scientific understanding is a form of domination, however, and the tool which Hayy uses—the knife—is as much a weapon as Crusoe's guns. Crusoe's desire

to dominate his environment and Hayy's "desire ... to study all the other animal organs" (117) are related. But in both cases there is a progression. Where before Hayy took the knife to nature, now he learns to help "any animal hurt, sick, encumbered or in need" (146). Where before Crusoe dominated Friday, he now learns "really to love" him (191).

The equivalent of Crusoe's encounter with Friday is Hayy's meeting with Absal, and many of the differences between these two stories of exile are implicit in the differences between these two encounters. The elements are the same, but they are displaced and distorted.

The respective roles of Friday and Crusoe in *Robinson Crusoe* are reversed in the respective roles of Absal and Hayy in *Hayy Ibn Yaqzan*. There is a comedic undercurrent—similar to the reversals and switching identities found in dramatic comedy—evident in Hayy's meeting with Absal. Absal comes to Hayy's island as Friday comes to Crusoe's. When Absal sees Hayy he thinks him to be another self-exile. When Hayy sees Absal, he has "not the least idea what Absal [is], since he [has] the form of no animal he had ever laid eyes on" (158). Absal, who does not wish to interrupt Hayy's seclusion, "took to his heels and ran" (158). Hayy, "eager to find out about things" sets out after him (158). Fear, the motivation for flight which we have seen in Crusoe, is absent. It is replaced by politeness and curiosity. In the company of Absal, Hayy comes to resemble more a savage than a civilized man. Thus it is not Hayy who fears Absal, but just the reverse. When Hayy catches Absal, Absal seeing "his captor, clothed in hides still bristling with fur, his hair so overgrown that it hung down over a good part of his body... was terrified and began to beg for mercy" (159). Where Crusoe teaches Friday to speak, here it is Absal who teaches Hayy how to speak. Even in minor elements of the narrative these reversals occur: it is not Hayy who wears the skin of goats on his island, but Absal who wears "a long black cloak of wool and goat hair, which Hayy [takes] to be his

natural coat" (158).

The reversals and differences between Hayy and Crusoe we have noted above are clearly reflected in the way each text presents the footprint of the other. There is no footprint on Hayy's island. Not that the text does not mention a footprint; but that it insists on the absence of a footprint when it tells us that Absal "surveyed the whole island without seeing ... a footprint"(158). This presence in the text of the absence of the footprint is significant. On the one hand, Hayy, a creature oriented to rise and for whom the body is merely a tool, can be expected to leave no footprints. The stars with which Hayy feels kinship do not make "imprints on anything physical" (139), nor does Hayy. On the other hand, for Hayy, who feels so strongly that the physical world is the result of God's "wonderful craftsmanship" (134) so that he cannot look at it "without immediately detecting in it signs of His workmanship" (135), the island itself is the footprint and the sign of the Other.

On his island Crusoe believes the footprint is Satan; Hayy believes it is God.

### **CODA**

That we are living in a period where Islamic communities are seen by Western communities as sources of "terror" and Western communities are seen by Islamic communities as homes to "Satan" is an indication of how deeply rooted in the cultural formations of each community may be the oppositions we have seen between Hayy and Crusoe. The two narratives show that the conflict between these two communities cannot be reduced to simple misunderstanding. This is not to say that there is no misunderstanding between the two communities, but that it is by no means simple.

It is a simplification to say that Hayy and Crusoe speak a different language; for the words we have used to compare them are often the same. If we say, for example, that Crusoe in

his "hurriedness" and relentless need to be busy is really "running in circles," we have to admit that Hayy, who "prescribed himself circular motion of various kinds" (146) is running in circles as well. But while the words are the same, the significance given them is different; or perhaps more accurately, while the words are the same, the grammar in which their significance is established is different.

Even at the level of apparel we see how the different grammars can construe the same object differently. In America the running suit is close to becoming a national garment and fits the furious expenditure of energy so natural to Crusoe. The very same suit is worn in Egypt. In Egypt it is not a garment in which to run; but, because its loose folds are so comfortable, it is beginning to rival the pajama as the preferred suit for relaxation.

There is one point of basic similarity between the two communities, however, where the words and the grammar are the same: the sense of exile. Both communities carry within them a sense of not being where they are meant to be, of not having reached their respective havens. This condition of being in exile is deeply rooted in each community.

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*The Elephant's Watch, a fourteen-century Arab miniature, from al-Jazari's *Book of Tools**

**IBN TUFAIL'S  
HAYY IBN YAQZAN  
— ALIVE, SON OF AWAKE —**

Being a recasting in poetry of a prose translation of  
*Hayy Ibn Yaqzan*, by Ibn Tufayl

**PROLOGUE**

In this story by Ibn Tufayl, philosopher physician to the Almohad Dynasty of Muslim Spain, first in Granada and then in Marrakesh, Morocco, start of the twelfth century, there is the

step-by-step spiritual journey of a soul from babyhood to wise adulthood, taught through his senses and his intellect directly by the Divine Reality, and this

tale antedates Robinson Crusoe, but was translated into English by Defoe's time, and was a model for that later book. So much for

groundwork. The truly interesting thing is how proof of the Creator comes by means of reason, and investigation of



reality so minute as to be in the realm of  
physics.  
And enfolded in it (beginning of  
twelfth century Muslim Spain!), is a

basis for unified field physics of today, 1996,  
lost, as we are, in the woods of  
terror and unbelief, calmly as possible  
trying to put together a  
picture of unity and light  
to replace random chaos set loose in  
rambunctious universes all  
overlapping haphazardly and strangely  
going, rudderless, about their  
business.

Ibn 'Arabi, of a generation after  
Ibn Tufayl, great Sufi mystic, provides the  
specific metaphysic to it when he says:

*"The universe exists on what is between the circumference and the dot, on ranks, and the smallness and greatness of their spheres. The one nearer to the circumference is wider than the one which is inside it, and so its day is longer, its place wider, and its tongue more eloquent. All things look at the point of their essences: and the point, despite its smallness, looks at every section of the circumference by its essence. So the epitome is the circumference, and its epitome is the point, and the opposite, so look!"*

And:

*"Every particle of the world is from the whole of the world. That is—every single particle is capable of receiving into itself all the realities of all the single particles of the world."*

And finally:

*"Man is the sum of all the 'flakes' of the world. And from man to everything in the world is a flake extending from that flake. There is nothing in the universe but that it has an effect in man, and man has an effect in it. And these flakes are light-rays-of-light."*

## THE ISLAND OF ALIVE, SON OF AWAKE

### I

The little boy baby is washed up on an island.  
The island, *this island*, is what we're

seeing, what we with our eyes open  
see all around us, and this baby  
in its purity  
washed by a wave onto the beach, is brought up by a  
doe, softly licking his face as he  
lies on the sand, and then  
nudging him, finally bringing him  
along with her somehow and  
bedding him down with her  
fawns in the pine-needles and  
leaves.

It is late. The light is low. The forest deepens with  
the dark.

Time passes. The child grows. He cavorts with  
fawns for friends, and speechless

sees through the leaves the  
light of night and day.  
The light of night being the knowledge of sleep,  
lodestone of dreams, flutter and  
fragile sweep of worlds as they  
rearrange their sensual modes in our  
sleep. He slept, and in

first daylight woke to lope with deer on hillsides  
looking for berries or edible  
leaves. And they  
showed him the seasonal yields, and he  
selected the ones most  
suitable to his palate, and he grew  
strange but as wise as those young eyes could  
train him to the particular world  
around him. He watched for its  
measurements, its qualities, its strange  
characteristics: water wets, dust dirt, fire  
burns, heat scalds, cold things grow warm,  
warm things cold, long days, short days,  
the howling nights, the days alert to  
crack and whistle of warbler or

waterfall.

## 2

He masters the minute movements of his flesh, the  
muscles of arm and fingers' definite grasp,  
he knows the holes to avoid on the daily routes,  
he sticks close to the other, hairier beasts,  
looks in the lakes and sees his difference,  
sees his definitely different face but also sees

his eyes that see, as deers' eyes see, his  
mouth that opens with tongue that licks  
as his mother licks his  
    face with her dry bristly tongue, to soothe  
        or wash his definitely  
    hairless face,

he sees the differences in the watery ripples  
but he also sees the samenesses.  
And that was his first step to what he  
    later saw.

The days go on. The woods and hillsides of herbs and  
thistle, spring flowers golden and  
    wild, white-petalled and  
        sweet, he pads with his ten-toed  
    feet across clover valleys, he  
sits in his naked boy body in gushing cascades,  
in streams and rivulets to let the cold  
    water collide and come to-  
    gether again past his sides.

3

The versions of how Hayy got there differ.  
Some even suggesting that by a  
    peculiarly suitable juxtaposition of climates,  
        warmth and moisture balanced just so,  
and with a ray of light just  
    slanting into the mixture, he  
spontaneously originated out of the  
    alchemization of clay and water and  
light.

A bubble formed in the churning clay,  
and Allah's spirit-breath, which  
    animates everything, flooded in at the  
moment of coming-to-life. Metaphor,

metaphor of what  
brings light to life in beings come  
    out from the dark in  
malleable flesh, and against the  
backdrop of rocks and inanimate creations,  
equally "created," but denser and less  
able to dance about it, or sing praises  
    than man. So he

sprang up alchemically out of clay, as do we  
all, springing through human process, up into life,  
out of the substrate, the marvelously  
    rich-textured fabric which could just as easily  
go on warbling alone  
to its own devices.

Other versions say, as we did, that,  
with some misty history behind it, his  
    mother wanting to save him from  
    a tyrannical king, he  
was washed onto shore, in a little wooden  
box, filled with  
downy feathers, but although he remained  
with it for a long time in his youth, and  
eyed it with wonder, and although he  
knew he wasn't deer or animal like the others,  
he outgrew the little cradle-coffin, and  
stayed with the doe as his mothering whisper,  
    and with her  
    learned the

forest lore of survival and love.  
For it was love that moved his  
constellation so.

And so he grew. And saw  
the changes shift with quickness over the  
shadows of his friends, saw them  
grow horns, saw them get  
hooves and nails and defend themselves,  
saw they had tails or fur over their

private parts, while he had none.

He felt defenseless, even naked. He felt more  
naked than they. More  
exposed. To light, to  
openness, to danger. Saw he  
moved differently, on two legs,  
than they. Fashioned  
a shirt out of leaves, plaited  
vines around his waist, but they  
withered, and he was  
naked again.

He fretted, as a shiver of nerves, as a  
constant, his defenseless  
nakedness in the furred forest  
getting to him somehow.  
He wanted a tail, a tuft, some  
covering. But he grew none, and thought he might  
find one on a body discarded in death, but  
saw how  
live animals ran from

carcasses. Then one day he  
encountered an eagle splayed  
dead in a glade, light filters  
shimmering down through the  
high trees onto the form  
so majestically displayed in  
stasis in the needles. He  
spread out, so gingerly, its  
massive wings, its tail, *his* tail,

he saw how it would cover him, so he  
sliced with a sharp edge he had, and  
cut a flap of skin as loincloth for front and back,  
threw the huge tail onto his back as cloak  
and put the grand wings on his arms, and now  
walked like a wingéd thing  
commanding space on the  
forest floor as the bird had commanded  
space in the air  
in flight, and the  
other animals fled from him in  
fright, to see this

loping, wingéd boy with jaggedy  
wing feathers and skin flaps both  
in front and back, and from  
behind, the white-tipped  
tail-feathers of the kingly  
eagle.

Lightning-flashes of sunlight!

4

He walks with more  
muscular strides as he grows taller, and  
sees farther, and hears a  
new gruffness in his voice, and the  
deer mother grows old.

She slows, and he leads her to sweet grasses  
and sugary berries, finds them himself  
and feeds them to her as she  
weakens. She one day

dies. She lies on her side, exhausted, eyes  
silently dark, staring, soft, animal, sweet  
and stonily still, curved inward to that  
incommunicado world past human ken  
that even Hayy could not enter. He saw her  
drift off into animal one-pointedness, that  
proud and hermetically self-contained  
arena of eloquently articulate  
animal-sensitivity, her nose quivered, her  
flanks quivered, her hooves  
drew together. She lost

strength in her neck on the pine needles and couldn't  
even raise her head to look at him, but  
she managed to lick his hand as he  
petted her neck and side and swollen  
belly, and finally

her round black eyes glazed over and she  
died.



The forest trees closed tight branches overhead  
above him, and seemed to encage  
darkness. There was no sound. There were no  
movements for the longest time, no  
newts in dry scramble, no buzz of fly or  
sizzle of snake or weasel broke the  
silent spell death had so  
sweetly cast over the present scene.

She was gone. She was  
lost to him forever. That much he  
knew.

He felt heart-wrenched, he felt  
speech almost forming articulate  
sentences in his body to express  
new shapes and shadows he had  
never before felt any need to sound.

There would have arisen a song, but he  
knew no song. The whole

world of bird and animal singers usually made the songs  
round in the air a-  
round him, he felt out-

ward with his fingers, he felt  
cold flanks and back and nose and  
belly of deer hours later when he  
saw that he hadn't moved one  
inch from that spot.

5

In fact, more precisely, he had  
cried out to her, trying the  
various calls they used for various  
meanings known  
only to themselves -- hurt, healing, happiness,  
hunger -- he had cried into her  
yawning space to get some  
response, some murmur of  
similar cry, and had  
gotten none, and at the  
end, when it was  
articulate song that was the  
animated meaning inside him, the cry  
changed to whimpering, to  
loneliness, to  
loss.

He had leaned close, he had  
faced her face to face and  
eye to eye, he had  
pressed his face on her  
cold neck, he had cried even a  
horrible echoing cry that  
ricocheted from  
tree trunk to tree trunk and had caused a  
flurry of tree squirrels, he had

howled, he had  
transcended deer-squeeks, he had  
simply howled into the  
gone space where  
emptiness had replaced what he had so  
intimately known, when the

eyes were filled with  
reflectiveness and  
sharp connection.

Now the silence engulfed them. Now the noise was over. Now the commotion ceased, and he was left with the puzzle. He took account of himself. He saw a need for action.

First thought: take away the hurt. Take away what is obviously obstructing, as hands over eyes obstruct vision or palms over ears obstruct sound until the palms are removed and high-pitched noises enter in again. Take away, in the same way, that *whatever-it-is* that is covering over the functioning organs and so bring her to life again.

He looked at her face. Glazed eyes, but otherwise perfect. He felt her now frigid body. All parts were in order. Nothing seemed to be amiss, nothing clogged or cankered, or cracked or covered up that needed to be loosed.

His mind was now set loose. He looked, but saw that outwardly nothing showed

obstruction, so that

it had to be *inside* her, that  
thing that caused the  
stoppage.

Hollows inside, he knew  
from investigating other carcasses, were in  
head, chest and belly. But having  
felt the pounding in his chest when  
alarmed or running, having  
protected his chest from horns when  
fighting brother beasts, having

felt a great turning there, a wave or  
whooshing of something that he  
wordlessly thought of as life, he felt  
that it was somewhere in the heart itself,  
that central pump of life-giving animation,  
where he would find the obstruction and remove it.

He waited, fearful that  
opening her would damage her beyond recall  
(he had never seen an opened creature  
get up again),  
but he decided to know, and to  
try. So he  
cut open her breast with his  
finest and  
sharpest flint.

Slicing carefully through flesh and  
organs, he came to the lung, went  
past it  
through the protecting  
membrane to the, carefully now, cutting

and peeling back, hunched over  
fretfully in the  
fading sunlight, finally to the

heart,  
he reached the heart and laid it bare.  
He found it hollow, soft rather than  
robust, so  
decided to open it, since  
what he was after must be there, and found one  
chamber clogged with a thick clot of blood  
and the other empty.

Since he had seen no blood flow and not flow  
completely out to  
the point of killing, he decided  
it wasn't loss of blood, but rather  
the emptiness of what was in  
that ventricle that caused his  
mother's death.

Gone, it left her senseless. Gone, she was  
motionless as stone. Emptied of  
whatever it was, she was  
moisture and flesh, and a  
carcass cast aside. She was

not there. She was  
gone. She was  
elsewhere.

It wouldn't come back to a  
body torn open. It had  
gone on before, it had  
left before the body perished, while it was

functioning and full, but now it was  
definitely elsewhere.

He let the body  
go.

He looked on the  
carcass as if it were  
mud, a form in sudden  
stasis after such flow, but now

wrenched neck-back and stiff, tail  
still of its twitching, not even  
shaking its flies, and so it was  
worthless as stone.

What was it that had left it?  
What exit did it take?  
What was it like  
when it was inside?  
Why did it leave? Why did it  
loathe her? Where did it  
go, and what

was it? Dazzled as if by  
sunlight in the  
simmering twilight, his  
buzz-thoughts circulated as his  
awe increased. It was  
*she*, that something, it was  
what was *she*, none other, what had  
left her was what was  
in her that licked him and  
fed him, and finally

left him, leaving this  
stiff-legged empty bag of  
shapely bones and  
soft organs behind.

He loved the spirit of her more as the  
body looked more unlovely. All  
night he sat by her, thinking these  
thoughts, but as the  
days wore on, the body also wore  
away, and stank, and became

animated now by life forms other  
than its own, teeming maggots of  
other-worldliness whitely chomping  
down her flesh, and wearing it  
away bit by bit, until  
the bones showed.

Two ravens fought by her head. One  
struck the other dead. Hopping  
excitedly around it, he  
couldn't revive it. So he  
scratched on the ground until he'd  
scratched out a hole, and pushed the  
black carcass into it, and covered it  
over with a mound, and cawed  
away.

Hayy couldn't bear the sight of the deer's  
body any longer, so  
taken by the light of her  
spirit in his mind, that he,  
after watching the two ravens, saw  
how to bury her at last,

so he dug all around her, and finally

heaped earth on top of her

so he could train his gaze  
past her earth-part

onto the pure spirit of her life.

*Daniel Moore*





## ECRIRE AILLEURS... YOURCENAR ET L'AMÉRIQUE

Nous sommes à l'automne 1939. La deuxième guerre mondiale vient d'éclater. Une femme jeune encore et sans doute un peu anxieuse s'est fait photographier vers le 14 ou le 15 octobre. Elle est tout de blanc vêtue avec un grand chapeau d'époque. La légende qui illustre le négatif est ainsi libellée: "Marguerite à 36 ans. Bordeaux, le jour de son départ pour les États-Unis"<sup>1</sup>. Dans le port, le paquebot qui l'emmène en Amérique pour un séjour de quelques mois, s'apprête à lever l'ancre. Celle qui serait un jour la première femme écrivain à être admise à l'Académie française regarde disparaître les côtes familières, ignorant que le voyage temporaire se transformerait en un éloignement qui durerait jusqu'à sa mort, ignorant que l'Amérique allait désormais devenir sinon sa patrie, mot qui est étranger à son vocabulaire, au moins le pays dont elle prendrait un jour la nationalité et surtout le lieu où elle s'établirait pour écrire. Les États-Unis pour elle en cet instant d'Octobre 1939, c'est, comme elle le dira plus tard à Jeanne Carayon, seulement un "départ" comme tant d'autres : "Pour mon compte, je n'avais pas du tout pensé cinq minutes à ce pays avant l'âge de 35 ans. La Grèce était devenue mon centre et j'imaginai qu'elle le resterait. Les extraordinaires carambolages du hasard et du choix en ont décidé autrement"<sup>2</sup>.

Commencé comme un simple voyage, l'un des

innombrables que faisait à cette époque la vagabonde Yourcenar - semblable à celui qu'elle venait d'effectuer naguère en Nouvelle Angleterre pendant l'hiver 37, l'aventure américaine tourne à l'exil tandis que la guerre transforme l'Europe en camp retranché, hérissé de barbelés, un exil de dix bonnes années où la nécessité, sous de multiples formes empêcha Marguerite de retourner dans l'ancien monde. Elles seront nécessaires, ces années pour que se redistribuent les cartes dans un monde normalisé et pour qu'on puisse considérer comme choix véritable celui qui tiendra l'écrivain la plupart du temps à sa table de Petite Plaisance auprès de Grace Frick, sa compagne de vie, plutôt qu'à Capri, à Paris ou dans les Flandres. C'est clairement autour de 1951, date des Mémoires d'Hadrien que pour Yourcenar, la question passe de où habiter c'est à dire survivre, à où vivre c'est à dire où écrire, et qu'elle y répond par le choix américain.

Mais aucune vie n'est monolithique : à la mort de Grace Frick, en 1979, à nouveau liberté lui sera rendue de repartir et elle repartira effectivement... mais en voyage, avec un jeune homme aimé qui lui rappelle l'homme aimé dans sa jeunesse, et elle reviendra à Mount Desert pour y mourir seule.

Alors, hasard ou nécessité, chance ou destin, choix de vie ou déterminisme et dépendance? "Quand je considère ma vie, je suis épouvantée de la trouver informe. L'existence des héros telle qu'on nous raconte, est simple; elle va droit au but comme une flèche... Ma vie a des contours moins fermes"<sup>3</sup>. En reprenant à son compte ces paroles qu'elle prête à l'empereur Hadrien, Marguerite choisit de s'en tenir aux "carambolages du hasard et du choix." Pour nous, maintenant que son existence s'est refermée sur elle même et prend avec le recul des contours plus fermes, les interrogations se multiplient qui ne se limitent pas nécessairement à la vie de Yourcenar : que signifie pour un écrivain d'écrire "ailleurs" que dans la matrice culturelle où il a été nourri? Qu'a signifié pour une Européenne du 19<sup>e</sup> siècle, modelée par cette Histoire qu'elle appelle "la mémoire

humaine” et dont elle a visitée les traces dans la Grèce de Pindare, ou l’Italie du Denier du rêve que d’habiter à Hartford, Connecticut, d’enseigner dans un collège de la banlieue de New York, et d’écrire enfin au bout du monde, dans l’île du Mount Desert?

A ces questions que Yourcenar n’a pas manqué de se poser à elle même, pendant les 45 dernières années de sa vie, on ne peut tenter de répondre aujourd’hui qu’en consultant la correspondance, les entretiens et les différents documents personnels que l’écrivain a bien voulu laissé derrière elle, notamment à la bibliothèque Houghton de Harvard et dans les archives Gallimard. Car l’œuvre demeure muette sur ce sujet, sauf comme caisse de résonance, et, hors l’étude sur les Negro sprituels et la présentation critique de la poétesse américaine Hortense Flexner, l’Amérique n’y figure pratiquement pas.

La réponse à ces questions nous importe, pas seulement à cause de Yourcenar, mais au nom de tous les expatriés qui, comme moi, comme d’autres, connaissent depuis longtemps ou depuis peu la dure et salutaire expérience de la rupture et de l’arrachement, de l’exil et des multiples et incessantes adaptations et réadaptations. En essayant d’escorter l’écrivain dans ce long itinéraire par lequel l’éloignement se fait habitude, et le dépaysement familiarité, je me suis tout d’abord rendue compte qu’il n’y a pas de tracé direct de la route qui mène du départ involontaire à l’intériorisation du fait accompli.

### L’EXIL OU LA PETITE SIRÈNE

Et tout d’abord, dans la première décennie, il y eut ce que j’appelle improprement l’exil, terme qu’on ne trouve pas sous sa plume et qui correspond seulement en partie à sa situation d’éloignement imposé par la guerre, la nécessité de gagner sa vie et la dépendance à l’égard de Grace Frick, l’Américaine dont elle commence à partager la vie. “Je n’étais pas non plus une réfugiée française aux États-Unis, au sens propre du terme, écrit-elle à un correspondant polonais probablement émigré lui

aussi, car j'y suis allée de mon plein gré pour des raisons d'amitiés et de projets littéraires (...) et si les événements politiques, la santé et d'autres raisons personnelles encore m'y ont retenue plus longtemps que je n'avais pensé, je n'ai été en aucun cas forcée d'y rester parce que mon pays était pour moi fermé. J'indique cela pour montrer que nos situations ne sont pas parallèles. Néanmoins je sais ce que c'est de se trouver dans un pays étranger où un élément de méfiance ou d'incertitude subsiste toujours à notre propos, quoi qu'on fasse, et de s'y trouver parfois démunie de moyens"<sup>4</sup>.

Au moment où Marguerite Yourcenar, dans la fin des années 30 s'éprend de Grace Frick, elle est au bout de ses ressources. Celles qui lui restaient de sa mère, elle les a croquées en se donnant " dix à douze de luxueuse liberté"<sup>5</sup>, c'est à dire en menant la vie de bohème dissipée dont le goût lui avait été inoculé par son père Michel. Elle a voyagé, erré d'un hôtel à l'autre aux quatre coins du monde ou dans des résidences louées à Sorrente, à Capri, en Suisse ou en Grèce. Elle a vécu des liaisons et des passions avec homme et femme elle est habituée aux splendides banqueroutes de son père au jeu, et à ne pas compter.

En Amérique, cette aristocrate devra travailler, cette enfant qui n'a pas connu l'école va enseigner, cette artiste qui ne connaît que les livres que l'on fait et que l'on lit devra prendre sur le temps des livres, gagner péniblement un maigre salaire, dépendre financièrement d'une autre: "Vous comprenez bien, écrit-elle à son ami Joseph Breitenbach, le 7 avril 1951, que ce n'est pas sans regret que je suis restée si longtemps éloignée d'Europe, mais mes arrangements personnels et financiers ne me permettaient pas autre chose. J'ai souvent souffert ici d'une grande solitude intellectuelle, excusez le terme, un peu pompeux"<sup>6</sup>.

L'environnement, dans les années 40 dut paraître bien rude à cette jeune femme de lettres, pétrie de culture classique et de l'Europe des cercles littéraires et de joutes intellectuelles.

Elle reconnaît qu'elle "ne s'acclimatait qu'à peine" en plein maccarthisme et en pleine guerre froide dans ce Hartford "réactionnaire, chauvin et protestant avec une nuance de bienséance sociale et mondaine" et où "une opulente vieille demoiselle me demandait d'un air soupçonneux si les Français étaient toujours catholiques," tandis qu'une autre "également active dans toutes les sociétés de bienfaisance et les institutions culturelles locales s'étonnait qu'on pût regarder des estampes japonaises, le Japonais étant l'ennemi"<sup>7</sup>. Quelques années plus tard, elle ferait pour son ami grec Constantin Diamaras un sobre bilan de la rudesse des conditions de vie en Amérique pour un homme ou une femme habitué à la douceur européenne: "L'ajustement aux conditions de travail aux États-Unis n'a pas été, comme vous le pensez bien, toujours facile mais je suis fière de l'avoir fait et d'avoir cependant continué mon travail d'écrivain (...) Depuis un an, l'infinie sollicitude de l'amie avec laquelle je vis et qui j'espère viendra avec moi en Europe, m'a permis de renoncer temporairement à mon travail de professeur, travail point complètement dépourvu d'intérêt intellectuel ou humain, mais qui s'accorde du moins pour moi assez mal avec le métier d'écrivain et qui me fatiguerait beaucoup"<sup>8</sup>.

A la difficulté de travailler à quarante ans bientôt quand on n'en jamais pris l'habitude, et de vivre dans un milieu professionnel, s'ajoute celle, bien connu des exilés contraints ou volontaires, de se faire des amis: "Je ne me suis jamais à aucun degré enracinée dans le milieu universitaire américain, écrit-elle en 1956 à son ami Jean Lambert, les quelques rares amis que j'y possède me sont venus soit par Grace, soit par Hadrien. L'expérience pourtant a été intéressante. Je suis reconnaissante à Sarah Lawrence de m'avoir fourni les moyens de rester aux États-Unis mais je ne recommanderais à personne ce genre de vie, à moins d'avoir un goût bien déterminé pour l'enseignement et une extrême curiosité pour la vie américaine et le dépaysement particulier qu'elle implique"<sup>9</sup>.

Bilan un peu sombre qu'elle cherche néanmoins à équilibrer, surtout lorsqu'elle compare sa chance avec les innombrables détresses du moment mais elle soupire après les douceurs européennes: "C'est partout que les pierres sont dures; et comme me le disait une petite fille américaine à laquelle je citais ce proverbe, c'est partout que le sable est tiède et doux au bord de la mer, et l'air du matin délicieux. Durant la dernière catastrophe, le pays a joui de certaines immunités; ce sont là de grands bienfaits. D'autre part certaines facilités de la vie méditerranéenne, si familières que nous les remarquions à peine, le loisir, les flâneries, la conversation amicale n'existent pas, et si on parvient à les obtenir (et j'y parviens) c'est en se plaçant à contre courant de la vie américaine proprement dite. Et cependant j'ai fini par aimer beaucoup ce pays, ou du moins certains endroits et certains êtres"<sup>10</sup>.

Ce discours raisonnable de 1947 est cependant démenti dans la Préface que bien des années plus tard elle ajoutera à sa pièce *La petite Sirène* écrite en 1942. Elle avoue qu'elle s'est identifiée "à cette créature brusquement transportée dans un autre monde et s'y trouvant sans identité et sans voix"<sup>11</sup>.

### LE SOUVENIR DU PARTHÉNON

Sans identité et sans voix. Voilà comment s'est ressentie, dans la province américaine des années 50, celle qui incarnerait une certaine pureté, une certaine intégrité de la langue française. Or pour perdre une voix ou une identité, il faut en avoir possédé une que l'on n'a plus; il faut avoir des références, des repères. Quels repères pouvait avoir cette ancienne fille de la bohème dorée des années 30, en rupture de ban avec sa famille, avec son nom qu'elle a changé et toutes les conventions de son milieu? Sa nationalité ou plutôt ses nationalités, elle en résumait ainsi l'itinéraire en 1977: "Je n'appartiens pas à la belge, ayant été française avant d'être américaine, et c'est à titre étranger que l'Académie royale belge a bien voulu m'accueillir. Mais le pays de ma mère et de ma naissance... m'est cher"<sup>12</sup>.



Avec l'élection à l'Académie française elle retrouverait sa citoyenneté d'origine.

Mais une nationalité ne se résume pas à un passeport. Autant et même plus dans les Flandres belge ou française, elle s'est sentie chez elle à Capri, à Sorrente, à Monte Carlo, en Suisse où son père est mort en 1929, dans cette Europe qu'un Européen ne discerne clairement que lorsqu'il l'a quittée.

Toutefois, de tous les pays européens, c'est la Grèce qu'elle a le plus ardemment aimée, cette Grèce dont elle a découvert avec d'autres qu'elle a été "le grand événement, peut-être le seul événement de l'histoire de l'humanité, que ce miracle est le produit d'une certaine terre et d'un certain ciel, que la passion, l'ardeur sensuelle, la plus chaude vitalité s'expliquent et nourrissent ce miracle et que l'équilibre et la sagesse grecque dont on nous parle tant ne sont ni le maigre équilibre ni la pauvre sagesse des professeurs"<sup>13</sup>, cette Grèce enfin "qui a su formuler au cours des siècles toutes les vues possibles sur la métaphysique et la vie, le social et le sacré et offrir aux problèmes de la condition humaine des solutions variées, convergentes ou parallèles ou souvent totalement opposées, entre lesquelles l'esprit peut choisir"<sup>14</sup>.

C'est dans cette Grèce qu'elle s'est ouverte à la passion, à la beauté et à l'intelligence dans ce qu'elle a de plus humain et de plus raffiné, c'est dans cette Grèce là et sur cette Grèce là qu'elle a écrit ses premiers poèmes, qu'elle a brûlé de tous ces feux qu'elle n'avait pas allumés mais dont elle avait réussi à faire un brûlot littéraire. En ces heures noires où l'Europe toute entière paraît sombrer "comme un monde disparu, submergé, désormais sans terre ferme," depuis "cette espèce d'arche que furent les États-Unis" où Yourcenar "a le sentiment affreux de flotter seule"<sup>15</sup>, c'est de cette Grèce là qu'elle se sent fille, et par cette Grèce là aussi consolée.

"Qu'est-ce qui t'aide à vivre, se demande-t-elle à elle même, dans les carnets des années 40, dans les moments de désarroi ou d'horreur? La nécessité du pain à gagner ou à pétrir,



le sommeil, l'amour du linge propre endossé, un vieux livre relu, le sourire de la négresse ou du tailleur polonais du coin, l'odeur des airelles mûres ou le souvenir du Parthénon? Tout ce qui était bon aux heures de délices reste exquis aux heures de détresse"<sup>16</sup>. Dans le souvenir des heures de délices flotte en premier lieu le souvenir du Parthénon. Avec le temps cependant, le Parthénon se mélangera avec telle ou telle évocation de Bruges ou de Saint Rémi de Provence, d'Innsbruck ou de l'Andalousie, des brumes de Courlande ou de la "mer grise et argentée" et des dunes du Plat Pays. Avec l'effet d'optique que crée la distance, pour elle comme pour nous qui vivons en Amérique, les nations du vieux monde se rétrécissent jusqu'à devenir les provinces d'une Europe, de son Europe de voyageuse itinérante, semblable à l'Europe du Zénon. Et elle se languit de cette Europe plus qu'elle n'ose l'avouer à Grace et aux amis de ce pays sans mémoire où la trace de l'homme s'efface au fur et à mesure que déferlent les vagues des nouveaux immigrants.

Et elle rêve, elle rêvera toute sa vie de l'Europe du dix-neuvième siècle qu'elle a arpentée avec Michel son père, et ses amis cosmopolites des années 30, semblable "à un beau parc où les privilégiés se promènent à leur gré et les pièces d'identité servent seulement à retirer les lettres à la poste restante,<sup>17</sup>" aussi éloignée que possible d'un quelconque esprit de clocher encore moins du concept barbare d'état-nation... d'une Europe révolue.

### LA FRACTURE

Car de cela, peu à peu, elle prend conscience: l'Europe de sa jeunesse a été fracturée par la guerre aussi brutalement que sa propre existence. Lorsque Yourcenar essaiera de faire revivre aussi les heures de détresse, elle comprendra que ce n'est pas seulement son drame personnel de petite sirène, immigrée dans un monde étranger où elle a perdu à la fois sa voix et son identité qui a entraîné dans sa vie la cassure définitive des

années 40. Non. Un autre drame, collectif celui-là, s'est joué entre les frontières de cette vieille Europe qu'elle regrette et qu'elle ne retrouvera pas intacte, un drame qui va miner en profondeur toutes les valeurs et même les préjugés auxquels elle s'associait avant guerre et motiver à long terme la décision de rester en Amérique.

La guerre tout d'abord l'avait isolée de l'Europe et transformé le voyage de plaisance en exil forcé puis le bruit de guerre, étouffé par l'éloignement, réduit au silence toute tentative pour faire entendre sa voix d'écrivain et la confine au personnage de petite sirène: "Il est trop pour parler, pour écrire, pour penser peut-être, et pendant quelque temps, notre langage ressemblera au bégaiement d'un grand blessé qu'on rééduque. Profitons de ce silence comme d'un apprentissage mystique,"<sup>18</sup>. Et pendant ces années-là, effectivement elle n'écrit rien.

Enfin, la guerre ou plutôt la réflexion sur les crimes de l'homme et les horreurs du monde qu'elle a dévoilés, vont s'inscrire dans l'itinéraire intellectuel et affectif de l'écrivain et transformer sa vision du monde. Cette prise de conscience prendra du temps. Au début, de l'Europe agonisante, s'échappent des rumeurs énigmatiques comme les fumées des camps d'extermination, qui crachent des nouvelles ambiguës, le bombardement des pays, la mort d'une amie qu'elle aimait, l'agenouillement de ceux qu'elle respectait, la disparition des autres. De la confusion de toutes les valeurs antérieures, émerge le sentiment qu'avec l'inextricable, on est déjà dans l'inéluctable. Qu'il va falloir accepter: "Accepter, lit-on encore dans les carnets des années 40, que tel ou tel être que nous aimions, soit mort. Accepter que tel ou tel être vivant aient eu leurs faiblesses, leurs bassesses, leurs erreurs que nous essayons en vain de recouvrir de pieux mensonges, un peu par respect et par pitié pour eux, beaucoup par pitié pour nous mêmes et pour la vaine gloire d'avoir aimé seulement la perfection, l'intelligence, la beauté"<sup>19</sup>.

La belle Lucie Kariakos qu'elle avait chérie avant guerre

a été tuée dans un bombardement de Janina, André Fraigneau, celui pour qui brûlaient en vain tous les brasiers de Feux a opté pour l'Allemagne nazie, et avec lui des hommes qui furent les amis ou les guides littéraires de la jeune Yourcenar, comme Edmond Jaloux. Ces déceptions et ces chagrins intimes se mêlent au spectacle horrifié de tous les désastres du siècle, du lancement de la bombe atomique à la découverte d'Auschwitz où elle fera le voyage en 1963, en comptant " les millions de morts des camps de concentration, les fosses communes de l'Ukraine et de Stalingrad, les centaines de milliers de brûlés de Dresde et d'Hiroshima, les victimes des raids sur l'Angleterre et ceux des longues marches dans la jungle birmanienne ou des combats en Cyrénaïque ou dans les forêts de Finlande, les résistants perdus de la Norvège à la Yougoslavie"<sup>20</sup>.

Sans avoir besoin de recourir à l'exemple de Sartre qui n'aurait peut-être pas écrit *La Nausée* après la guerre, ou de Camus qui n'aurait sans doute pas écrit *La Peste* avant, Yourcenar elle même se situe, fait rare pour cet écrivain de rupture, dans une mouvance générale, lorsqu'elle écrit à propos de Roger Caillois: "Les années de la seconde guerre mondiale et celles qui l'ont immédiatement précédée et suivie ont opéré pour certains d'entre nous une espèce de reconversion (...) Sans me comparer le moins du monde à ce grand esprit ( Roger Caillois ), j'ai connu vers la même époque, quelque chose de la même scission"<sup>21</sup>.

L'assimilation des effets de tous ces crimes du siècle se sera opérée lentement, aboutissant à ce "partage des eaux" que la biographie de Yourcenar trace nettement, a posteriori, entre les années européennes et les années américaines. Si elle même hésitait à discerner dans ce virage définitif de son existence la part du hasard, la part du choix, c'est parce qu'elle découvrait que, comme tant de ses contemporains, quoique beaucoup moins que d'autres, elle avait été elle aussi emportée dans le tourbillon de l'Histoire.

L'accumulation des désastres, ce qu'elle appelle

pudiquement "l'état du monde" transforme le regard, même rétrospectif qu'elle portait sur les lieux d'autrefois. Elle contamine aussi celui qu'elle porte à présent non pas sur l'Amérique, qui participe, en plein maccarthisme de cet "état du monde" mais sur la retraite de Mont Desert qu'elle représentera toujours comme un *no man's land*, lieu de nulle part, auquel sa position insulaire épargne le bruit et la fureur humaine : "Je vous avoue que l'état du monde m'a jetée dans une crise de désespoir dont je ne suis pas encore sortie, et qui est insensée, écrit-elle à Julie Tissamino, le 4 février 1957. Car nous attendions nous à mieux ? De ces chagrins, on n'est pas à coup sûr indemne dans l'île des Monts Déserts plus qu'ailleurs, mais au moins j'y trouve une occasion de retraite dans le travail dont je me sentais pour le moment incapable en France"<sup>22</sup>.

Face au préoccupant "état du monde", Camus prône l'engagement fraternel, Sartre l'engagement idéologique, certains entrent au Parti communiste ou en sortent avec fracas, d'autres encore professent l'absurdité de tout. Yourcenar, elle, se choisit une retraite à l'écart du monde et se résout à ce que ce choix tourne, dans le contexte affectif et bureaucratique ambiant, à l'irréversible. Elle prend des dispositions pour marquer son choix de vivre là. A la fin de l'année 47, elle demande et obtient la nationalité américaine, renonçant par la même - telle était la règle à l'époque - à sa nationalité française. Elle vote pour la première fois aux États-Unis le 2 novembre 1948. Le 29 novembre 1950, elle devient copropriétaire avec Grace Frick d'un cottage à Northeast Harbor qu'elles nommeront Petite Plaisance en souvenir de Samuel Champlain : "J'ai longtemps aimé les îles, dira-t-elle. J'ai aimé l'Eubée, j'ai aimé Capri (...) chaque île est un petit monde à soi, un monde en miniature (...) On a le sentiment d'être sur une frontière entre l'univers et le monde humain"<sup>23</sup>.

Ainsi la vagabonde, la cosmopolite, qui joue à saute mouton sur les nationalités, en attendant le retour à la case départ, trouve le moyen d'habiter à Mount Desert sans vivre en

Amérique, et défie la clôture des frontières en s'installant à la lisière marine de l'homme et du cosmos. Et elle décide que c'est dans cette île au milieu de nulle part qu'avec la protection de Grace, elle pourra et devra écrire, à peu près au moment où s'achève la rédaction des Mémoires d'Hadrien, difficilement composé dans le voyage entre New York et Connecticut, et dont les premières lignes, de l'aveu même de l'écrivain renvoient tout autant à un bilan provisoire de sa propre vie que de celle de l'empereur.

### LES FILS DU TEMPS ET DE L'ESPACE

"J'ai ma chronologie à moi, impossible à accorder avec celle qui se base sur la fondation de Rome ou avec l'ère des Olympiades - quinze ans aux armées ont duré moins qu'un matin d'Athènes; il y a des gens que j'ai fréquentés toute ma vie et que je ne reconnaitrais pas aux Enfers. Les plans de l'espace se chevauchent aussi. L'Egypte et la vallée du Tempé sont toutes proches et je ne suis pas toujours à Tibur quand j'y suis"<sup>24</sup>. A cette déclaration d'Hadrien, fait écho une lettre de Marguerite à propos du Mont Noir, le château de son enfance disparu, coupé en deux par une explosion pendant la guerre de 14 : "Hélas, à notre époque surtout, il vient toujours un moment où l'on peut dire, comme le héros de Corneille, sans orgueil (...) mais en y mettant pas mal de tristesse : Rome n'est plus dans Rome, elle est toute où je suis"<sup>25</sup>.

Ainsi s'enchevêtrent les fils du temps et de l'espace dans la trame de l'écriture, lieu ultime de résolution des conflits d'exil et de séparation. Comme le remarque Josyane Savigneau, "derrière elle, tout s'était défait, avait été détruit : sa maison natale avenue Louise à Bruxelles, le Mont Noir, la villa de Westende achetée par son père sur la côte belge et bombardée pendant la guerre de 14, l'appartement de Lausanne, et même les hôtels parisiens qu'elle affectionnait. Le Wagram, sa résidence d'avant la guerre où elle avait rencontré Grace, avait été dévasté par un incendie, et l'hôtel de St.James et d'Albany,

où elle descendait avec Grace dans les années 50 et 60 a été démembré, une partie était vendue par appartements en 1977". Ses demeures ont disparu, l'Europe est loin, son Europe est révolue. Qu'à cela ne tienne, elle les récréera par l'écriture comme elle a récréé l'antiquité de l'empereur.

"Comme toutes les imaginations nourries et façonnées par l'histoire, il m'est arrivé souvent de tenter de m'établir dans d'autres siècles, d'essayer de franchir plus ou moins la barrière du temps (...) Mais le déplacement dans le temps n'est jamais mieux obtenu que par le déplacement dans l'espace, tel lieu, nouveau pour nous, mais très ancien, nous dépayse assez pour nous engager à la fois dans une double aventure"<sup>26</sup>. Ecrire pour Yourcenar, c'est prendre de la distance - distance de soi et de l'autre, distance du temps et de l'espace. Le déplacement géographique double et renforce le déplacement historique et personnel, créant dans son œuvre une caisse de résonance, un creux où l'écriture orchestre ses voix, et convoque, dans la vacance crée par le décalage temporel et spatial, la mémoire de la destinée humaine. La recherche du temps révolu se double d'une recherche de l'espace perdu, dans cet éloignement qui entretient aussi le flou, la confusion entre les êtres lointains et les êtres du passé, les personnages des romans et les personnages de la vie entre lesquels l'écrivain ne fait aucune différence, regroupant dans les mêmes listes les dates de leur naissance et les dates de leurs morts, et sans doute aussi dans son esprit les lieux réels ou mythiques où ils ont passé. Et ce n'est pas un hasard si l'Amérique trop proche qui environne l'écrivain tient si peu de place dans son œuvre. On ne parle bien, on n'écrit bien que de ce qui vous a, une fois au moins échappé. Désormais pour l'écrivain la planète a deux visages, l'Amérique où elle habite et les mondes lointains où elle vit par procuration, de même que l'histoire a deux faces, l'époque contemporaine qui est la sienne, peu représentée dans ses livres, et les temps anciens, ceux d'Hadrien, de Zénon et de Michel, où elle s'est installée à son habitude en itinérante, passant sans

frontière des uns aux autres dans une ronde acrobatique, un bal masqué, un déplacement perpétuel de soi dans l'autre, dans l'ailleurs et dans l'autrefois.

### LA FIDÉLITÉ À SOI MÊME

Et par une intériorisation du retournement, elle légitime le hasard du départ puis le choix de rester, comme une forme de fidélité à soi même : "Loin de voir dans la volonté de l'individu d'être ou de rester ce qu'il est une forme de l'habitude, j'y verrais plutôt le contraire de celle-ci. C'est à dire que l'habitude pour moi serait d'ordre extérieur, croûte de routines machinales, d'ordre social surtout, dont l'être se laisse entourer et, s'il est faible, à l'intérieur de laquelle il s'étouffe ou s'éteint."<sup>27</sup> En s'arrachant à l'Europe, elle prend conscience qu'elle a sauvegardé en elle le noyau dur de l'identité. Car le piège est d'abord engluement dans un ordre conventionnel - famille, communauté, caste, nom, moralité bien pensante ou allégeance aux modes dont l'individu s'émancipe en quittant son lieu d'origine pour demeurer plus proche de lui même et de ses engagements premiers, C'est Jeanne d'Arc partant pour Chinon, c'est Byron voguant pour Missolonghi qui font acte de fidélité à eux mêmes, contrairement à un Proust qui s'enlise dans le réseau conventionnel du salon parisien. En rompant ses liens avec ce qui la détourne de l'existence primordiale qu'elle a choisie, elle affirme donc, dans l'apparente contradiction entre les années européennes et les années américaines, une continuité essentielle qu'elle n'aurait peut-être pas maintenue en restant ou en retournant en Europe. Ascèse douloureuse il est vrai, et qui s'apparente à cette entrée en religion qu'avait désirée pour elle sa mère mourante, mais qu'elle revendique comme le prix à payer pour garder l'intégrité et la disponibilité nécessaire à son œuvre.

Somme toute, contrairement aux clichés à partir desquels souvent les journalistes l'interrogeaient, il ne s'agissait pas pour Yourcenar de s'adapter en Amérique, mais tout au contraire de



se choisir un lieu de passage où elle ne se sente jamais vraiment adoptée : "On demeure longtemps des étrangers, des nouveaux venus dans les paysages américains; en somme, c'est un paysage qui n'accepte pas très bien l'homme"<sup>28</sup>. A cet égard, Mount Desert constitua-t-il sans doute l'espace idéal où l'écrivain devenu célèbre à Paris et ailleurs, demeura plus de trente-cinq ans, une quasi étrangère.

#### DU NAGEUR À LA VAGUE

A partir de ce moment où Yourcenar intériorise la contrainte de partir pour la convertir en décision de rester, les justifications directes ou indirectes ne vont pas manquer. Nous avons vu comment elle a commencé à légitimer un choix imprévisible pour elle dix ans plus tôt. Les raisons personnelles, c'est à dire l'attachement à Grace Frick n'expliquent pas tout dans la mesure où Grace aurait pu elle aussi se déplacer en Europe. Mais chez Yourcenar l'évolution spirituelle ou intellectuelle, même si elle est reconstruite a posteriori prime, au moins officiellement sur le lien privé. Et cette évolution l'amène à comprendre que la cassure de la guerre et la scission opérée en elle par la prise de conscience des horreurs et des crimes perpétrés sur le sol même de son Europe bien aimée, l'ont détournée de l'homme et de la civilisation qu'il a faite à son image, et dont il s'est servi, pour chérir un univers dont l'homme n'est à tout prendre qu'un élément parmi d'autres : "Ces années furent celles où, cherchant dans le passé un modèle resté imitable, j'imaginais encore possible l'existence d'un homme capable de "stabiliser la terre," donc d'une intelligence humaine portée à son plus haut point de lucidité et d'efficacité. Mais c'est aussi le moment où je commençais à fréquenter, avec une passion qui n'a fait que grandir, le monde non humain ou préhumain des bêtes non encore jetées bas ou déflorées par nous. En d'autres termes, que je prêtais à l'empereur Hadrien lui-même, mon allégeance commençait à passer "du nageur à la vague"<sup>29</sup>.



Ainsi les années désastreuses ont-elles permis à l'écrivain de passer "du nageur à la vague". L'ancien monde, raffiné et civilisé, le berceau de la Grèce antique qu'elle a tant aimé, s'est désavoué au profit d'un monde plus ancien encore et plus intègre parce que moins marqué par les traces et les vestiges du passé humain. En 1940 elle écrivait déjà: "L'aire des voyages se rétrécit à l'époque des convois et des frontières fermées. Profitons des hasards qui nous retiennent momentanément loin du présent de l'Europe et de son histoire, dans des lieux presque dénués de toute référence au passé humain. Allons plus loin dans le dépaysement et le départ... Entrons dans une solitude neuve et plus complète encore"<sup>30</sup>.

Tournant le dos au passé de la vieille Europe, elle va paradoxalement dans la solitude et la primitivité du Nouveau Monde, remonter plus loin encore dans le temps "jusqu'à une époque où la lumière, la couleur et le son se prodiguaient paisiblement, dans un univers qui n'avait pas encore inventé l'oreille ni les yeux", arrêter sa contemplation "sur ces grands objets toujours semblables à eux mêmes, la mer pareille à ce qu'elle fut avant la première pirogue, avant la première barque, le sable, calcul infini qui date d'avant les nombres; et ce nuage plus ancien que les profils de la terre, et ce plissement silencieux de la neige sur la neige qui fut avant que la forêt, la bête ou l'homme ait été, et qui continuera sans changement quand toute vie se sera dissipée ou tuée... que ce voyage dans le temps aboutisse à l'extrême bord de l'éternel"<sup>31</sup>.

Par ce jeu de déplacements si fréquents chez Yourcenar, l'écrivain parvient à faire du Nouveau Monde, généralement associé aux représentations et aux mythologies de l'avenir, l'archétype du passé idéal, de l'extrême du passé celui d'avant l'homme, faisant l'impasse sur le futur pour déboucher sur le présent de l'éternel. Et ayant évacué les constructions de l'homme de ce passé d'avant le passé, l'écrivain le réintègre dans l'histoire éternelle du monde primordial: "Dans les forêts américaines où l'on peut marcher des jours durant sans

rencontrer âme qui vive, il suffit du sentier tracé par un bûcheron, pour nous relier à toute l'histoire"<sup>32</sup>. Ainsi les fils dispersés de l'espace et du temps parviennent-ils à se rejointoyer, pour employer une expression yourcenarienne, dans un effort pour rejoindre au bord de l'éternel l'homme d'avant le crime, la notion de péché ou même de faute étant en tous points étrangère à l'écrivain.

Mais ce n'est que plus tard qu'elle reliera cette tentation de plonger dans le passé d'avant le passé au rejet des horreurs de l'histoire et du monde humains. Remontant alors à 1942, à l'époque de la Petite Sirène, elle précisera longtemps après: "Cette rêverie océanique date d'un temps où le vrai visage hideux de l'histoire se révélait à des millions d'hommes dont une bonne part sont morts de cette découverte; même à la distance où le hasard m'avait mise, j'avais vu ce que j'avais vu. C'est à partir de cette époque, et par l'effet d'une ascèse qui se poursuit encore, qu'au prestige des paysages portant la trace du passé humain, naguère si intensément aimés, vint peu à peu se substituer pour moi celui des lieux de plus en plus rares, peu marqués encore par l'atroce aventure humaine"<sup>33</sup>. Il lui avait fallu du temps pour mesurer l'ampleur douloureuse de la

Michèle Sarde devant "Petite plaisance". Photo H. Moreno.



rupture, la nécessité de l'ascèse, l'importance de l'acquis. Mais il est certain que dès la fin des années 40, à l'instar de la Petite Sirène, elle avait abandonné "ses jeux d'acrobate et le poignard de ses rancunes" pour rentrer à Mount Desert ou ailleurs, pourvu que ce fût ailleurs, dans les eaux primordiales dont elle était sortie après l'enfance, durant les troubles années européennes de Feux.

Lorsque viendrait pour Marguerite le temps des bilans, elle confierait à Mathieu Galey que non seulement sa vie mais son oeuvre n'aurait pas été les mêmes si elle était restée en Europe ou si elle était retournée en Grèce en 40: "je me serais attachée de plus en plus aux aspects formels de la littérature parce que le milieu où je vivais était extrêmement littéraire et je serais demeurée plus liée au passé parce que les sites eux aussi étaient tous liés à la légende antique: Venue ici et mise en présence d'une réalité tout à fait différente, massive et amorphe en quelque sorte, le changement me fut je crois très utile"<sup>34</sup>.

#### L'ILE DE MOUNT DESERT

Ainsi elle opta pour le monde primordial, elle opta pour l'île, elle opta pour la maison de Petite Plaisance qui n'est qu'un abri de fortune, un point géométrique à la surface du monde parce que "c'est là qu'on est. Mais rien à voir avec la possession: ces maisons là se passent de nous comme nous nous passons d'elles et meurent comme nous mourons nous mêmes. Si une catastrophe se produisait dans l'île des Monts Déserts, il ne resterait pratiquement aucune trace humaine au bout de quelques temps"<sup>35</sup>. Lieu de nulle part, Petite Plaisance est en même temps lieu de partout, échoué par hasard dans le Maine mais qui serait "semblablement battu des vents au nord-est de Goteborg, en Suède, en Bretagne, ou même à l'extrême sud du Portugal où l'écrivain accepterait de vivre"<sup>36</sup>, une espèce de Corse où de Dalmatie située sous un climat déjà polaire, écrit-elle dès les années 46 : c'était pour les Grecs les pays hyperboréens, pour les hommes du Moyen Age les régions de

brouillard et de banquises explorées par la navigation de St. Brandan. Eh bien je ne vois aucune différence essentielle avec ce que j'ai le mieux aimé en Grèce et ailleurs"<sup>37</sup>.

Le choix de Yourcenar lui paraît clair alors. C'est celui de la petite communauté villageoise où l'on connaît tous les habitants face à la ville anonyme, c'est aussi celui de l'isolement face à la dissipation mondaine. "Si je parlais d'ici, je m'établirais dans un autre village, du même genre d'ailleurs (...). Je vis ici comme je vivrais en Bretagne ou n'importe où. Mon choix de vie n'est pas celui de l'Amérique contre La France. Il traduit un goût du monde dépouillé de toutes les frontières"<sup>38</sup>.

La correspondance de Yourcenar, au fil des années 60, puis 70 reflète la commune existence tout à la fois tranquille et occupée de la campagne, dont les seules variations épousent le rythme des saisons, du "singulier printemps, mélange de journées admirables, claires comme du cristal et des jours où l'on est pris dans un banc de brume avec quelquefois des grains violents"<sup>39</sup>, à l'hiver quand "une couche pas très épaisse de neige couvre la terre et que des boules de verre or, argent, rouge, bleu, vert que Grace Frick fait suspendre aux branches de nos pommiers et cerisiers étincellent au soleil"<sup>40</sup>. Elle y évoque les mêmes plaisirs de la vie quotidienne, la flambée tous les soirs dans la cheminée du salon, l'autre à l'heure du thé, "dans le petit poêle ouvert du parloir qui a l'air d'un petit théâtre où danse la flamme"<sup>41</sup>, la fête d'Halloween, la galette des rois, la fabrication des pains aux raisins ou aux grains de cardamome, de la confiture, des gaufres, l'envoi aux amis de "maple syrup" parce que c'est ce qu'il y a de plus américain, dans des bouteilles de métal qui voyagent bien.

Volontiers dans sa correspondance Yourcenar fait-elle allusion à l'Amérique qu'elle a appris à aimer, "la grande Amérique d'autrefois"<sup>42</sup> avec ses vertus de "cordialité amicale" et de "simple hospitalité", avec ses minorités importantes et diverses dont elle salue les luttes à contre courant et dont elle épouse avec enthousiasme les causes antiracistes ou

écologiques.

Cependant les lettres de 1950 à 1980 donnent de plus en plus l'impression que Marguerite et Grace se sont installées dans le train train des jours et que Yourcenar vit plus avec ses personnages, dans le monde mythique et historique qu'elle sait récréer que dans la routine de Petite Plaisance. Comme si, reprise à nouveau dans la glace des habitudes qu'elle avait fuies, dès son adolescence avec son père, puis seule pendant les années d'errance, elle se donnait habilement comme seule échappatoire, la vie rêvée des livres.

### LA VIE IMMOBILE

Car le temps la rattrapait et s'employait à tendre des pièges à la vie qu'elle s'était fabriquée. Fuyant les conventions, elle s'est emprisonnée dans d'autres habitudes; fuyant les pressions sociales, les compromis mondains, les stratégies arrivistes, les vanités et les illusions des préjugés, Yourcenar presque septuagénaire se retrouve enfermée, malgré qu'elle en ait, dans un petit monde de routines qui l'étouffent de plus en plus. Pour rester elle-même, elle avait accepté de ne pas retourner en Europe, elle s'était tenue éloignée de cet univers potentiellement clos, représenté aux deux extrêmes par l'étroite Noémi et le nombrilisme parisien. Aujourd'hui, Petite Plaisance rétrécie par la maladie de Grace se referme sur elle. Elle suffoque mais elle ne peut pas partir, elle n'ose pas bouger avant que tout ne soit fini: "Ici les choses ne vont pas du tout bien, écrit-elle le 30 septembre 1977 à Joseph Breitenbach. Beaucoup de travail, vous l'imaginez et un beau voyage en juin en Colombie britannique et sur les côtes d'Alaska. Mais la santé de Grace est décidément très fragile et je ne suis pas non plus à l'abri de la fatigue. Le voyage de juin a été entrepris et réussi dans un moment de rebondissement où Grace allait mieux. Quand irons-nous en Europe revoir quelques amis comme vous? Je voudrais le savoir. Je vous embrasse"<sup>43</sup>.

A ce stade de sa vie, le sentiment d'éloignement et de

séparation du temps de New York et de Hartford qui s'était mué en choix dynamique de retraite où vivre et écrire, devient clôture et enfermement. L'écrivain sait que moitié par volonté, moitié par force, elle restera toujours extérieure à ce pays où elle habite depuis près de 40 ans. Elle sait aussi qu'elle ne regrette ni les dissipations parisiennes ni même les cercles intellectuels de Grèce ou d'Italie qu'elle fréquentait avant guerre. Elle sait surtout qu'à ce prix, elle a fait oeuvre, une oeuvre qu'elle n'aurait pas pu accomplir dans la proximité aveuglante de L'Europe. Elle atteint pourtant le temps où l'on se retourne sur ce qui reste.

Et qu'est-ce qui reste justement de son identité, dans cette Amérique de la fin des années 70, à cette femme née avec le siècle, dans la vieille Europe aristocratique?

#### UNE ENFANCE, UNE RACE, UNE LANGUE

À cette question, elle répond de façon éparse mais clairement dans la correspondance et dans *Le labyrinthe du monde*: il lui reste un lieu de mémoire qui est celui de l'enfance, une famille qui est, selon un terme étonnement désuet sous sa plume, celle de sa race, une patrie qui est sa langue, la langue française. Tout ce qui demeure de sentiment d'appartenance se cristallise à présent sur la Flandre natale, "ce grand paysage plat avec ça et là des collines témoins, qui est celui de Rembrandt mais aussi de la Flandre française d' Archives du Nord"<sup>44</sup>. Et se découvre dans sa correspondance de cette époque la conscience nouvelle d'un lien génétique avec des compatriotes flamands qui passe par les ancêtres, ces ancêtres qu'elle ressuscite patiemment dans *Le labyrinthe du monde* et qu'elle rêve nomades à son image: "Oui, écrit-elle à une correspondante flamande, nos ancêtres entre Newport et Dunkerque ont pu se rencontrer dans le passé, qui sait même s'unir, à l'époque après tout récente des états civils et des archives. Nous avons dans le sang la même mer grise et argentée, les mêmes dunes, et les mêmes plats pays (...) Mais que notre race est aventureuse(...)! Quand on pense qu'il y

avait aussi des Flamands à la cour de Genghis Khan!"<sup>45</sup>

Or l'évocation de cette Flandre des origines s'associe indissolublement avec le vert paradis de l'enfance du Mont Noir; l'écrivain a plaisir à constater au cours d'un reportage dans le lieu du château familial comment "toutes ces vieilles personnes se souvenaient d'avoir goûté avec moi au château, puisque c'était une espèce de château, elles se souvenaient de la famille allant à l'église le dimanche, de l'arrivée de la première automobile sur la place du village, quand tout le monde était sorti pour la voir, laissant le curé en plan. Ces gens se souvenaient aussi avec affection de mon père"<sup>46</sup>.

Sur la scène retrouvée de l'enfance, se regroupent les protagonistes qui seront ceux du Labyrinthe du monde: tout d'abord le père Michel et les mères de substitutions, Azélie la nourrice, Barbe la bonne, Camille, la gouvernante et surtout Jeanne, la mère rêvée, la mère recherchée dont le drame clôturera l'aventure inachevée de *Quoi? L'Eternité*. "Vient un moment (...) où l'on se met à faire certains comptes, confie-t-elle à Mathieu Galey, à passer par certains sentiers pour mieux situer le point où nous sommes"<sup>47</sup>. Dans *Quoi? L'Eternité*, Yourcenar ira aussi loin qu'elle a pu aller dans l'identification à elle-même, en évoquant ses "miettes de l'enfance." Nous ne saurons rien de la jeune fille, de la jeune femme, de l'adulte qu'elle a été. Le seul moi qu'elle ait consenti à aborder est celui de l'enfant qu'elle fut, sans doute parce qu'elle s'en est distancée, tout autant que d'Hadrien et de Zénon, et a réussi ainsi à se l'approprier par l'écriture. Parallèlement, les lettres de la même époque traduisent un intérêt très vif pour les correspondants qui lui rappellent des souvenirs de la petite enfance: "Monsieur le maire de Saint Jean Cappel, qui m'a écrit ces jours-ci a bien voulu me dire que vous vous souveniez de ma grand-mère et de moi nous rendant à l'église conduites par Achille (...) J'ai été très touchée par ce souvenir, d'autant plus que j'avais beaucoup d'affection pour Achille qui lui n'était déjà plus jeune en ce temps-là. Ma grand-mère ne me permettait pas de garder mon



chien dans la grande maison, et c'est Achille qui le gardait pour moi dans l'écurie où j'allais jouer tous les matins."<sup>48</sup>, et encore à une vieille correspondante: "Oui. Je me souviens comme si c'était hier de la procession de Saint-Jean Cappel, et même de certains enfants qui défilaient avec moi, et du petit Saint Jean avec son mouton. Je devais avoir cinq ans tout au moins, et neuf ans tout au plus, car j'ai quitté le Mont Noir en 1912. Je me souviens aussi des petites bottines blanches pour lesquelles il fallait se battre chaque matin avec un crochet à boutons"<sup>49</sup>.

Et à propos des liaisons entre l'enfance et le dernier volet du Labyrinthe du monde, Quoi? L'Eternité, elle dit dans une lettre à l'écrivain Jean Roudaut: "Parmi les êtres qui restent à décrire, ou à finir de décrire, il y a l'enfant qui grandit et à qui je ne peux pas faire la part plus petite qu'aux autres, seulement parce qu'elle est un premier état de moi même. Mais l'introduction de cette nouvelle et passagère identité est déroutante pour le moi qui parle. D'autre part, vous avez bien compris que ce qu'il importe surtout de montrer est la prise de possession de ce moi enfantin qui d'abord définit la personne, puis dissout celle-ci. J'espère trouver le moyen de montrer ce processus."<sup>50</sup>.

Cette "prise de possession du moi enfantin par l'expression" révèle comment s'articule, dans ce retour aux origines, le lien à l'enfance et le lien à l'expression c'est à dire entres autres à la langue. Ainsi Yourceanr, remontant aux sources de soi, ne peut qu'aboutir aux sources du langage par où commence son existence de femme et d'écrivain. "Elle a gardé jusqu'à sa mort, écrit Josyane Savigneau, c'est-à dire pendant 48 ans, la volonté inébranlable de préserver intacte sa propre langue qui n'était pas celle qu'elle devait parler lorsqu'elle sortait de chez elle et qui leur était comme une insularité seconde dans cette insularité première qu'elle avait choisie en s'installant à Mont Desert(...). Le patriotisme n'est pas un mot de son vocabulaire mais la notion qu'elle en a surgit dès qu'il s'agit de défendre son patrimoine linguistique". Sans nul



doute, si Yourcenar appartient à un pays qu'elle n'a jamais quitté, c'est bien celui de sa langue préservée jalousement de toute atteinte, notamment de l'anglais qu'elle mettait à distance par un accent que tous ses familiers s'accordent à juger épouvantable, et par ses réticences à répondre à ses correspondants anglophones autrement qu'en français quand ils peuvent le lire: "Excuse my rather wooden English, écrit-elle à un correspondant américain en 1979. As you know, I am French and compose my books in French, and writing in English is difficult for me"<sup>51</sup>. Dans les derniers mois de sa vie, elle soupirait de n'être entourée que d'anglophones. Car la langue française recouvre le territoire du sacré qui est celui de l'écriture; et c'est le premier et peut-être seul devoir de l'écrivain que de "défendre et prolonger les vertus d'une langue, de veiller à ce que l'eau du Grand Canal coule limpide jusqu'à nous"<sup>52</sup>.

Elle a coulé cette eau jusqu'à nous, tandis que le temps qui coule avec elle, à un moment, s'est arrêté pour Yourcenar. "Ma vie immobile date maintenant de près de 10 ans", écrit-elle en 1972 dans les Notes de composition sur l'oeuvre au noir. Autour d'elle comme autour de Zénon, son frère de fiction, cette vie immobile s'est lentement refermée. Certes Zénon retrouvait la vie immobile après être rentré chez lui à Bruges et c'est loin de Bruges et du Mont Noir que Yourcenar vieillissante est prise dans le lacet des routines mortifères de la vie immobile.

Pourtant l'opposition n'est pas aussi forte qu'il n'y paraît. Car nous le savons bien, dès le début de son existence, la patrie de Yourcenar, c'est l'état apatride, la seule existence où elle se sente à l'aise est le nomadisme: "On s'en fout. On n'est pas d'ici. On s'en va demain", déclarait son père Michel, qui n'était bien qu'ailleurs. Ces bohèmes ne font que passer, leur éden est le voyage "ce bris perpétuel de toutes les habitudes, cette secousse sans cesse donnée à tous les préjugés," comme le dit l'empereur Hadrien. A la vie immobile de Bruges ou de Mount Desert s'oppose pour Yourcenar comme pour Zénon le passage, le voyage, la traversée, l'expédition liée étroitement et

secrètement pour elle à l'érotisme et à la passion, puisque, comme elle l'écrit dans *Souvenirs pieux*, "l'obsession du voyage pour un cœur jeune est presque toujours corollaire de celle de l'amour."

Ce qu'elle ne sait pas encore, c'est que l'adjectif "jeune" est de trop dans la phrase, et qu'à 76 ans, l'amour et le voyage lui seront ensemble rendus, dès que la disparition de Grace Frick l'aura délivrée de la vie immobile. Cette dernière meurt en effet le 18 novembre 1979. Dès février, Marguerite s'embarque avec Jerry Wilson, le jeune homme passionnément aimé de sa vieillesse, pour les Caraïbes, le Guatemala et le Mexique. Et ce seront les grandes équipées à l'intérieur des Etats-Unis; puis L'Europe à nouveau, l'Angleterre, la Hollande, Bruxelles, les Flandres. Et jusqu'à la mort prématurée de Jerry Wilson, le voyage ne s'arrête pas. Comme au temps où Michel et Marguerite arpentaient l'Europe, cette presque octogénaire ne tient plus en place, elle revisite avec un homme jeune tous les lieux de sa jeunesse, même cette Grèce où elle s'était promis, au temps de la vie immobile, de ne plus remettre les pieds; et découvre avec lui le Japon, la Thaïlande, l'Inde et le Kenya.

Parallèlement la France, dont elle s'était coupée par l'éloignement et la naturalisation américaine vient à elle à travers la notoriété et l'entrée à l'Académie française. La nationalité française lui est rendue, Paris par l'intermédiaire des médias traverse l'Atlantique pour lui rendre visite à Mount Desert, sa cuisine de Petite Plaisance pénètre dans les foyers de millions de Français. Si dans les années difficiles, elle réussissait à tromper son exil dans son oeuvre et à s'y réfugier, désormais son oeuvre lui permet de triompher de cet exil et le transforme en appartenance.

La volonté de cosmopolitisme de Yourcenar s'était exprimée dans sa jeunesse par un rejet de sa famille et des conventions qui enracinent à une origine. Dans la vieillesse, l'aspiration universaliste la conduit à assumer complètement

cette origine pour mieux la dépasser: "Je n'ai repensé à mes origines flamandes que sur le tard, avoue-t-elle dans *Les Yeux Ouverts*. Oui, en me penchant sur mes origines, j'ai cru reconnaître en moi un peu de ce que j'appelle 'la lente fougue flamande.' Mais je suis française autant que flamande... chose plus importante et vérifiable que les identifications par le sang et par la langue, je suis française de culture. Tout le reste est folklore. Mais la culture française, comme toutes les cultures, petites ou grandes, se sclérose et s'étiole dès qu'elle refuse de faire partie de la culture universelle. J'ai plusieurs cultures comme j'ai plusieurs pays. J'appartiens à tous."

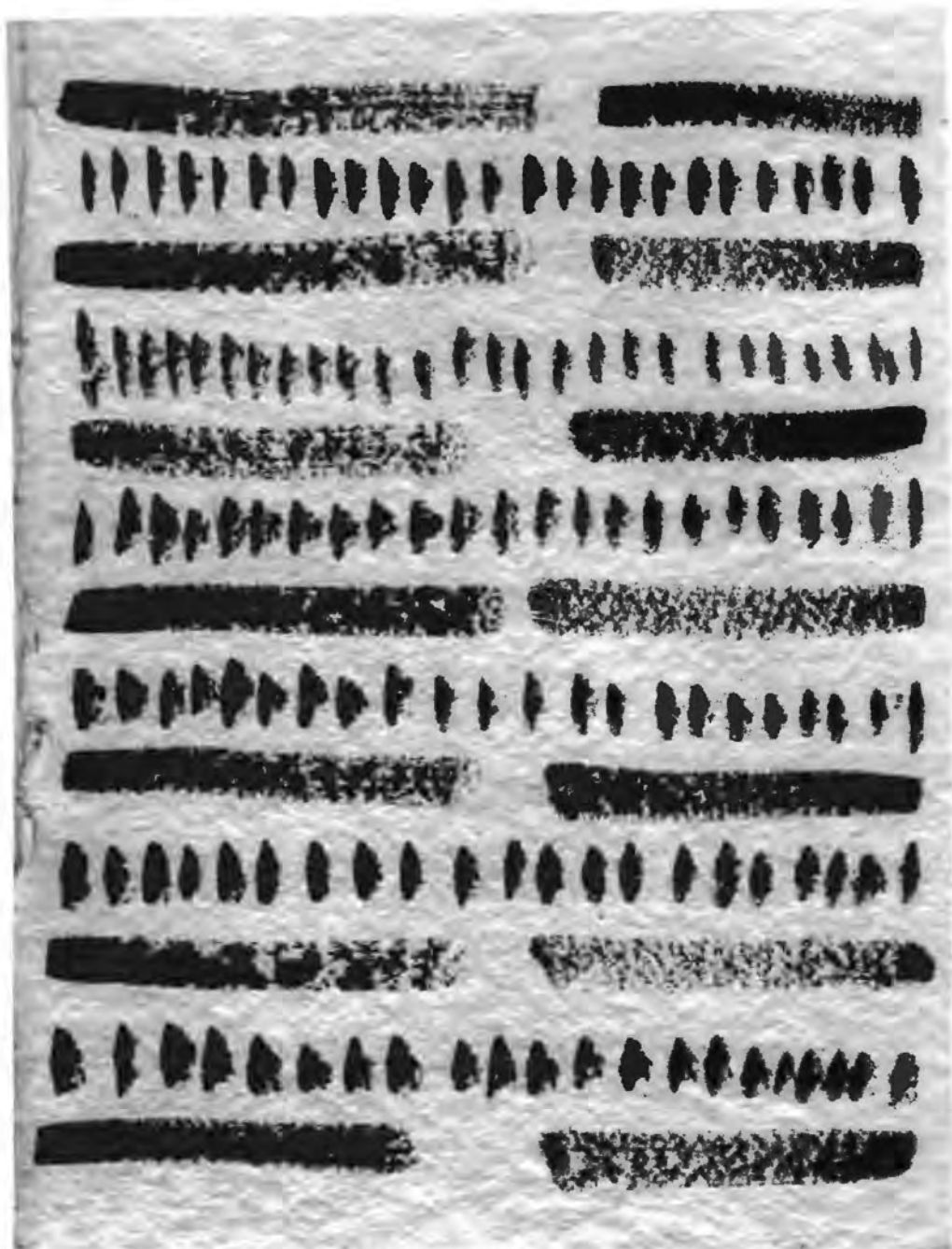
*Michèle Sarde*

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Etel Adnan, *Untitled*, 1991.

## SITT MARIE ROSE A VICTIM OF ESTRANGEMENT

"You Have Our Father Much Offended:  
The Trial(s) of Marie-Rose in *Sitt Marie Rose*"

"I want to make my peace with everyone.  
Even with my captors, I want to make my peace.  
I can no longer sustain this hatred.  
It's what brought us to this apocalypse"  
--Marie-Rose

*Sitt Marie Rose* (The Post-Apollo Press, 1982), the first novel of the Lebanese poetess Etel Adnan, is an expressionistic portrait of the Lebanese Civil War. The novel's protagonist Marie-Rose, an heroic, young Christian Lebanese woman, who has been living among the Palestinians and has a Palestinian lover, returns to Beirut during a "truce" to visit her pupils at a school for deaf-mutes, and is arrested, "tried," and executed as a traitor by a group of Christian Phalangist militiamen, one of whom is torn between his duty to the will of the group and his memories of affection for Marie-Rose, "Sixteen years could not have passed since I left my first man's kiss in your hair. He were both sixteen then." Ironically, Marie-Rose, who bears the name of both "the Virgin and her symbol" (The title "Sitt" is the Arabic equivalent of "Miss," but it may also be used by students as a respectful and affectionate title for a teacher.), was once a member of Lebanese society, but is now estranged from it, and returns as an outcast, a stranger. The arrest of Marie-Rose is

attributed to her support of the Palestinian cause, and thus, in the minds of Mounir, Tony, Fouad, and the friar Bouna Lias, the rejection of her religion and society, but what infuriates her captors even more is that a woman should dare to defy men. According to the novel's narrator, "Every feminine act, even charitable and seemingly unpolitical ones, were regarded as a rebellion in this world where women had always played servile roles. Marie-Rose inspired scorn and hate long before the fateful day of her arrest. "Her fate is sealed because she refuses to play the game--to be properly afraid of male power and to submit to its demands. For her enraged tormentors, she must die because she has offended the Father--God and the State--and she will not pray for forgiveness.

Mounir cannot stand to watch the execution of his former love and absents himself from the scene, but he does not dispute the decision of the others to brutally murder Marie Rose. Not only will her pupils witness her execution, but the delight Fouad takes in cutting her to pieces: "This female monster dares stand up to us when she's at our mercy. . . . She howled like a dog. . . . But I quartered her with my own hands. And these imbecile children watching us. They'll never forget what it costs to be a traitor. " To destroy her body is, however, a hollow victory, for this group of "crusaders" has been trampled by the spirit of a woman whose courage is born of love for her country and its children. The narrator finds that the desire of these men to eliminate Marie-Rose stems from their sense of inferiority rather than their sense of superiority, "Marie-Rose frightens them. . . . they've known from the beginning that they wouldn't be able to conquer either her heart or her mind. The more she spoke to them of love, the more they are [sic] afraid. "The desire of her captors to erase her example from public memory, to deface this source of feminine rebellion so that "she no longer has a face," is foiled by the novel's narrator, whose decision to tell the story of Marie-Rose immortalizes this idealistic teacher as an icon of feminist triumph. To narrate the

trial(s) of Marie-Rose is, for the narrator, also a catharsis of the bitterness she bears the patriarchal society and a reassertion of faith in herself; her struggle about how to express her pain at being confined within her society's "circle of oppression" is finally resolved. Her metaphor is derived from Abdel Nasser's diagram of the Middle East where a series of concentric circles represented the position of "Egypt, the Islamic Third World, the rest of the Third World....," a plan the narrator calls inherently flawed because it reinforces the vicious circle of oppression and betrayal. Within the interior spaces of such circles, dissent is crushed, the other forever excluded. In a space like that of Marie-Rose's classroom, Christ remains "a tribal prince," the militia not judges, but executioners. The narrator concludes that, "One is never right to invoke him in such circumstances, because the true Christ only exists when one stands up to one's own brothers to defend the Stranger. Only then does Christ embody innocence." Because Marie-Rose punctures the boundary of her circle of oppression, the narrator remembers that to be a rose, one must also have thorns. But to declare oneself a feminist is also a cry of liberation for the oppressed, a declaration that one will no longer be silent. For the author and her narrator, the battle cry takes the form of creating a novel whose force cannot be denied.

Adnan divides *Sitt Marie-Rose* into two main parts, "Time I/A Million Birds" and "Time II/Marie-Rose." Her strategy not only creates a frame story in the first part for that of Marie-Rose in the second part, but in so doing, emphasizes a juxtaposition between the nature of estrangement between social groups and that of estrangement between a given individual and her social group. "Time I/A Million Birds," which begins before the war and closes with images of war-torn Beirut, is about a quarter of the length subsequent division. The reader is introduced to an intellectual female narrator who searches for a way to articulate and resolve her conflict with society, and to several male acquaintances of hers, wealthy and



bored playboys whose peacetime hobby of birdshooting will take on new "purpose" when they later become Marie-Rose's captors. "Time II/Marie-Rose," which chronicles the trial(s) and execution of Marie-Rose, is divided into three sections, each of which is subsequently divided into seven chapters. In each of the seven chapters a different speaker presents his or her reaction to the protagonist at different stages of her inquisition, and the voices recur in the same order in the subsequent two sections as follows: (1) the deaf-mute schoolchildren, (2) Marie-Rose, her accusers (3) Mounir, (4) Tony and (5) Fouad, (6) the friar Bouna Lias [Father Elias], and (7) the novel's narrator. Unlike "Time I," "Time II" does not document the events surrounding the trial(s) of Marie-Rose sequentially, but presents a collage of those events through the eyes of the different participants. For example, in describing his observations of the reunion of Marie-Rose and Mounir, another captor called Tony comments, "Mounir and this woman look at each other without hatred. I don't understand. . . . My name is Tony and it will never be Mohammed. . . . This woman is nothing but a bitch."

Holed up in her Beirut apartment during the early days of the war, the narrator's artistic impulse to create the beautiful seems stifled amidst the unnatural effects of war. Like other women of Beirut who stay home as much in protest as in fear, the narrator confines herself to an interior space while the men fight: "Women stay home more than over. They consider war like an evening of scores between men." Obsessed by death and decay, all she can do is sit--her spine "a twisted, stunted, fallen tree, disappearing in the sun"--hunched over the newspaper as she reads the obituaries and "atrocities of the day." In the account of one of those atrocities, she finds a name, Marie-Rose, which may also be a sign of the blessing she is looking for. Since the beginning of the novel, she has been searching for a subject worth scripting. In "Time I," Mounir, having just come back from a birdshooting trip in Syria, has a

whimsical desire to make film about a Syrian villager's experience of life in Beirut and wants the narrator to write the scenario. The next evening he shows a super-8 color film of the hunting trip to a group of his wife's friends (including the narrator), "an audience of women in one of Beirut's most beautiful houses." While most of them appear properly impressed by the exploits of their men folk, Tony's cousin is "spiteful" because they refused to take her along: "They didn't want to be bothered." Such exclusion ensures a power over the women: the men have seen and experienced places the women have not. Or as Mounir puts it, "I can't tell you what the desert is. You have to see it. Only, you women, you'll never see it. You have to strike out on your own, find your own trail with nothing but a map and a compass to really see it. You, you'll never be able to do that." The narrator silently agrees with him, "It's true. 'We women' were happy with this little bit of imperfect, colored cinema, which gave, for twenty minutes, a kind of additional prestige to these men we see every day. In this restrictive circle, the magic these males exert is once again reinforced. Everybody plays at this game." Later, however, when she realizes that the kind of film that Mounir wants to make is not only shallow but untruthful, that "his film, decidedly, turns around nothing," she refuses to play. Mounir's reaction to the narrator's disagreement about the film's strategy, "No, no. You don't understand. You'll write the script. I'll make the film," is emblematic of the sense of blind superiority which characterizes Mounir and his friends Tony and Fouad, and which infuriates the narrator. This is not to say that the narrator or her author, for that matter, bear a general bitterness toward men, but towards those who take pleasure in maintaining an oppressive patriarchal structure in the family and the society. It is, in fact, a man, Marie-Rose's lover the Palestinian doctor, who offers to die in her place, and whose profession as a "healer" contrasts sharply with the destructive acts of her captors. Indeed, even as the narrator upbraids the Lebanese for

the pleasure they take in oppression and cruelty, she admits that the Palestinians are also guilty of similar crimes, "They, the Chabab [the young men], had to bring women back to order, in this Orient, at once nomadic and immobile. On the Palestinian side, they dealt with crimes similarly. Tho stakes were different, but the methods were the same."

Marie-Rose is not the only one in the novel who is on trial, nor is she the only victim of estrangement. Ready to make her "film," the narrator too becomes an outsider as she declares war on the patriarchal circles of oppression. Mounir says that while his youthful love for Marie-Rose has faded, "she is no stranger to me. I know her"; Marie-Rose disagrees, "Mounir was a complete stranger to her now." I interpret the novel's strategy as a juxtaposition of the trial(s) of Marie-Rose against the trial(s) of Beirut, where the citizenry allow tribal hatred to overcome their sense of reason and justice, and to make them strangers to each other. Thus the mentality of the three militiamen who mistreat Marie-Rose is representative of how such hatred leads to a dismemberment of Lebanese society. And while the immediate subject of *Sitt Marie Rose* is the suffering caused by the Lebanese Civil War, the situation is symptomatic of a much larger crisis which continues to persist in the Arab world in the form of political and religious divisiveness. The message which Marie-Rose is compelled to deliver, at the cost of her life, "the only true love is the love of the Stranger," is as timely, as crucial, for the whole Arab world as for Lebanon in the 1970's. Her words, however, are lost on "crusaders" whose fanatical resolve to eliminate the "other" blinds them to the sign of unity and peace which is signified by the return of Marie-Rose.

While the martyrdom of Marie-Rose at the hands of her Christian "brothers" sanctifies her in Christian terms, her role should also be understood as an example of existential heroism. The influence of French existentialist writers such as Albert Camus upon Arab intellectuals has been significant, especially

upon those who like Etel Adnan have been educated in France or in the French educational system in the Middle East. Thus it is not surprising that *Sitt Marie Rose* should consider existentialist topics such as alienation and absurdity, nor that it should be influenced by scenes in certain works of existentialist fiction. For example, Bouna Lias' efforts to convert Marie-Rose and her angry refusal to embrace the beliefs of her captors is reminiscent of how Meursault, the protagonist of Camus' *The Stranger*, rejects those of the priest who attempts to convert him. But while Meursault simply does not believe in God, Marie-Rose is horrified about what Christianity has become--a perversion of Christ's teachings in the name of power. When Bouna Lias tells Marie-Rose that he wants to save her soul, she retorts that to do so is hardly possible "When you sow hate, you sow evil without redemption. No! You have also perverted Christ." The friar is blind to the fanaticism of his flock, and thus blind to the truth she speaks. Resurrection awaits those who carry the image of the Virgin on their rifles, for they are "an army of saints on the march." Even in their final hours, neither Meursault nor Marie-Rose can submit to these messengers of God who seem more dead than alive, who preach the doctrine of Christian love, but seem to have so little understanding of what love means. The priest, for example, cannot understand why Meursault would prefer to see a vision of the face of his lover Marie take shape on the gray wall of his cell rather than that of Jesus Christ, and the friar is both puzzled and shocked that the blue-eyed Marie-Rose would prefer the arms of a Palestinian doctor rather than those of one like Mounir, trained by Jesuits to continue the crusades against the Moslem hordes. That *Sitt Marie-Rose* should use such parallels does not mean, however, that the subjects or strategies of the two novels invite a general comparison; rather, their presence encourages the readers to recognize how existentialist elements or how recognizable parallels with works of existentialist literature broaden the significance of Marie-Rose's Christ-like sacrifice: a

sacrifice made in an indifferent universe where the absurdity of one's existence should not dictate despair. Within the intersection of the circles of Christian and Camusian conduct, Adnan places the circle of the oppressed, such as a group of deaf-mute schoolchildren who will grow into powerless adults, who "have things to say, lots and lots of things, but no one's interested," or a woman on an honest crusade for peace who, despite the risk, goes home because she feels she must:

Why did I come up? I'm the director of this school and I teach here. I had to pay the teachers, and to find myself among these children again. My own are on the other side of the city. These are so vulnerable. . . . They're doubly walled in by the events that have closed their country on itself, and by their own handicap.

Shortly before Marie-Rose is executed, she indicts her so-called Christian brothers as grotesque mutations of the faith they serve. When Bouna Lias condescendingly queries, "You don't expect me to try and explain divine will to you?" Marie-Rose scornfully replies, "They said to you, 'Love thy neighbor,' and you eat each other . . . You've forgotten what it means to be human . . . And all that in the name of the love of the clan. What am I saying: You're practicing idolatry towards the group you belong to. " For Marie-Rose, there can be no more hope in a world where there is no love, where out of a hundred million Arabs "not one knows how to love . . .," where "the religious authorities, both Moslem and Christian, "have transformed your hearts to deserts . . . " What absurd wish does Marie-Rose bestow upon hearts filled with hatred of the Other? Not only tolerance, but love of the Stranger and, as a result, Arab unity:

I know that the only true love is the love of the Stranger. When you have cut the umbilical cords that bind you together, you will at last become real

men, and life among you will have a meaning. Marie-Rose confronts her death as a stranger, numb to her justices howls of execration, still believing in her message: "the true Christ only exists when one stands up to one's own brothers to defend the Stranger." If Marie-Rose speaks the truth, then why does the concluding image of *Sitt Marie-Rose* leave one with an image of estrangement, of a "Black Feast," as the deaf-mute children, having witnessed far more than children ever should, dance to the rhythm of their own destruction as the narrator comments:

Whether you like it or not, an execution is always a celebration. It is the dance of Signs and their stabilization in Death. It is the swift flight of silence among us. What can one do in this black Feast but dance? The deaf-mutes rise, and moved by the rhythm of falling bombs their bodies receive from the trembling earth, they begin to dance.

For those who witness four men bring down a "passing bird," there seems to be nothing redemptive about the sacrifice; instead of light, there is darkness. While the narrator sees the example of Marie-Rose as one who overcomes estrangement, whose life is a sign also recognizes the power of evil in the world and what is a greater threat than evil or death, despair. In the closing shot of her "film," the dance of the deaf-mutes articulates that despair and reminds us that it is against despair more than anything else that struggle, both as an individual and as a society. For example, when speaking of the dismemberment of Beirut, the narrator observes that its citizens

circle around each other in their hollow arguments, hollow like their ramshackle walls, their hatred, their blindness. They only address each other with cannons, machine guns, razors, knives. And the sea, receiving them in an advanced state of decomposition, reconciles them in the void.

About two years after the publication of *Sitt Marie-Rose*, Adnan published the epic poem *The Arab Apocalypse* (The Post-Apollo Press, 1989). The poet as avenging angel foresees how terror and carnage in the Middle East can only lead to damnation and endless Night. Like the narrator of *Sitt Marie Rose* who "films" the documentary of Marie-Rose in order to both teach and inspire her "viewers," stanza XL of *The Arab Apocalypse* begins, "the sun is a camera which operates only in black and white." Like the sun, the eye of the poet bears witness and thereby illuminates the truth. Only Night, estrangement and hopelessness, unless one abandons hatred, makes the sign of peace, and learns to love the Stranger as Oneself.

*Diana Haddawy*

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## GRASPING THE MICROCOSM ON THE 10:25 OUT OF YOKOHAMA

I'm chanting my litany down in the underground shopping mall called *The Diamond* in Yokohama, Japan.

"Go Go Go GO GO GOGOGOGOGOGO!"

The middle aged woman in front of me steps aside, gives me a curt look over her shoulder and disappears up one of the stairwells to the bus stops.

"Thank God. You old bat." I say it loudly with perfect enunciation as I push on ahead. I'm pleasantly amused with myself. Speaking English here is like performing a private magic show. No one can break my spells, they're all in English. "Hocus Pocus you're an old bat." Try to figure that one out. Give me all the dirty looks you like; ha. I live in code.

I'm in the rhythm of the crowd now, though, and I adeptly maneuver around the young mother--infant strapped on her back, toddler towed along on her right side--and neatly swing my attache case up and over the passing businessman's briefcase on my left. I go on like this, stopping only when I absolutely have to. Artfully flicking a glance at my wrist, without even breaking stride, I'm able to ascertain the time--10:10 p.m. I'm making good time. I'll make the 10:25 bus easily.

Now that this part of the day is almost complete I start to speculate on the evening ahead of me. Dinner. What do I want



to do about dinner? As I pause and consider dashing in to the convenience store right there by the bottom of bus #23's stairwell I realize that a small group of college girls has paused across from me. In fact! they're minutely inspecting me, and all the usual responses flood through my mind. Nylons? Shirt untucked? Unbuttoned? Stained? Bra strap showing? Did I step in something? They notice my spot inspection and as their hands flutter over their mouths capturing their twittering laughter I turn away and confronts reflected in the store window, something disturbing. Blonde hair, light eyes, paler awkward, big boned, *gaijin*; me.

I need this kind of thing occasionally. It jars me out of myself and helps me remember that I am indeed different. I am surrounded by a sea of black hair, black eyes, neat trim figures, and among them I am big, blonde, and foreign. I stick out, barely touching the surface; a human buoy.

The humiliation, the sting of self-consciousness slips off, forming a puddle on the ground, and I resolutely step over it. They're still giggling, but I'm not listening to them, I'm chanting again. "Different. *Gaijin*. Gotta remember that. Different. *Gaijin*." I look back into the store window and lock gazes with myself. "Outsider. Wear it like a shield."

\* \* \*

My frustration and outrage became a cloak I wore in all kinds of weather. I needed something to keep those eyes off of me. It was all the staring; they all stared at me. They all seemed to realize that I was not the same sort of person that their men and women were. It felt as if all those eyes were scalpels, dissecting, probing. The result was something very painful that slowly seemed to spread from out of my soul through my mind, onto my face, to leak out of my eyes, and finally leave me almost completely empty inside, isolated, stranded in a foreigner's body.

And then one day I found myself weeping silently into a collection of E.E. Cumming's poetry on the bus. I could taste

each word; I felt each word on my tongue, its sensual curves, its pungent nuances. And I wept, because I was on my way to the conversational English school I taught at, where I would never be able to teach about Buffalo Bill and his watersmooth-silver stallion.

I had become an alien in an alien world, where the words that drifted towards me in bars, around me in the shopping markets, never formed themselves in my blood and bones as my own language did. I came to realize that my language acted to define me, and more and more I noticed that while I could translate "please" and "thank you", I could not hope to translate myself, and so my language held my bones and blood suspended above the culture I lived in.

It hurt, physically. I choked on frustration, I could feel the heavy weight of despair pressing, trying to suffocate my soul, and I was frightened. I could feel what I should not have been able to feel--my ribs; I felt them splinter and bruise from the beatings--things trying to get out, things trying to get in.

It was the staring. Day after day, night after night, it was waking up and pushing onto a crowded train and finding that I was the focus point of twenty or forty eyes. It was feeling as though they looked in scorn, contempt, disdain... the glares, the men looking at me lewdly, the children looking at me in fright, the older women looking at me in disgust, the young women looking at me and giggling. The weight of those stares, the frustration of having nothing solid to fight against, wrestling with a scream that could not come out, must come out if only one more stare sank into my skin.

All of those eyes seemed to chant. They murmured with gathering force, "We do not want you here. Go home."

I wore sunglasses on the train at night. I wrapped my face in my muffler when I got on the bus.

I tried very, very hard not to be; not to be seen, not to be noticed, not to be touched; and then it happened. It happened so casually, so slowly, so characteristic of the ordinary that it

shocked me out of myself. One hand became the hand of many. It became the palm and strength of different countries, times, and men and women. It cradled the soft head of a new born in awe and love, it gripped the stock of a rifle, it peeled potatoes, rinsed rice, it held a pen and it stroked a lover. Humanity chose that moment, that precise moment to condense itself down into a hand. It was a beautiful hand. The graceful long tapered fingers, the wide palm, the sheer dimensions of strength and skill that the hand carelessly proffered arrested me. It was mesmerizing.

It happened at the most ordinary of times. 10:25 p.m. --when bus #23 left, on the dot, night after night. The man with the beautiful hand had just lurched up the bus stairs as the door slid closed behind him. And, startled by the sudden appearance of that hand levering up the man, two words rang in my mind, "Strong. Perfect."

My very soul was stunned by the impact of this hand, my thoughts were gripped by it. That night at 10:25 p.m. I found myself in a grasp I could not elude. The man with the beautiful hand not only rode #23 every night, he got off at the same stop as I. In the following weeks I waited each night, bound tightly in my overcoat and muffler, shivering, looking for that hand, straining to see it; and each night my soul thrilled to rise to its clasp.

One question provoked, aroused and bred all my meditations. Why? Mesmerized by a hand? An old Japanese man's hand? He must have been at least 6 feet tall--unusual for a Japanese man his age. A slight covering of pure white hair graced his mostly bald head. He didn't smile. He didn't glare. Any sense of decorum abandoned me; I jostled others to get closer to him; yet he did not once look at me. He either stared far away into the distance, or he closed his eyes. He looked weary, and yet his entire frame seemed to constantly proclaim the hidden depth of solid reserve he held within. It came out of his finger tips. It spoke to me in whispers. "I'm tired. I'm old.

But look at what I have held. Look at what I have touched. I have helped others stand, I have held those who could not stand, I have risen up in anger, and I have rendered applause to what I considered great and worthy things." It was spoken in a language that I could understand, this reached my heart and stroked my soul. This hand touched me.

And it was then, as it whispered, that I felt the emptiness slowly filling up with questions, questions to heal all the rebukes of silent hours under loud stares. I had been living frozen, my soul a lonely, secluded place. While all around me there had been people, I had not been living among people. It took an old man's hand--a Japanese man's hand--to touch me, to shake me out of myself, to show me the possibilities I lived among. Around me, across from me, beside me, human intercourse went on. Delicious, dizzying, delightful, my mind filled with questions, eager to find the answers. My world so condensed--expanded, and as I stared at a hand--suddenly beautiful, unexpectedly stirring--the questions began to intertwine, to weave, to dance in proclamation of a soul no longer suspended.

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## **ONLY ONE MODERNITY?**

### **ARAB AND WESTERN MODELS OF MODERNITY CANNOT BE THE SAME**

The classic definition of culture was given by Tylor: "Culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities acquired by man as a member of society."<sup>1</sup> Kluckhohn defined culture as "the total life way of people."<sup>2</sup> Culture, according to one definition, is "all the modes of thought, behavior, and production that are handed down from one generation to the next by means of communicative interaction - that is, by speech, gestures, writing, building, and all other communication among humans."<sup>3</sup> Culture, then, has its ideological, subjective, and objective elements. Depending on cultures, concepts have different meanings, and these meanings, in turn, help to determine the culture. Concepts are the product of their historical-cultural backgrounds. Consequently, they also have ideological, subjective and objective elements.

Societies differ from each other as a function of their historical-cultural backgrounds. In societies whose historical-cultural backgrounds are more similar, the meanings of their concepts are more similar, and vice versa.

Arab and Islamic modernity and awakening<sup>4</sup> have been the subject of study and discussion in many Arabic writings in the past two centuries. Webster defines modernism as "(a) a practice, usage, or expression peculiar to or characteristic of

modern times, (b) a way of living or thinking characteristic of modern times."<sup>5</sup> These writings included two major trends: one of adaption to a wide range of aspects of Western civilization, as conceived by those writers, and their absolute or near absolute acceptance of them; and a trend towards reconciling the Arab-Islamic and Western civilizations.

There has also been a position taken by a third group, which was the subjugated and helpless majority of the Arab people, the civilian society, characterized by skepticism of or resistance to what was presented to it as features of Western civilization.

By contrast to the first and second trends, which have received a considerable measure of study, the position of the majority of people has received little examination. In order to know the Arab historical reality, however, it is also necessary to study civilian society for its important role in Arab history.

It needs to be mentioned here that there exist certain similarities between some aspects of Arab-Islamic and Western civilizations.

It is impossible to achieve the Western model of modernity in a cultural and historical environment other than the Western environment because it is impossible to fully transfer the meanings of concepts from one cultural and historical environment to another. The concept of modernity derives from a certain cultural-historical background. This background mainly includes, but is not limited to, people's culture, history, heritage and inclinations. Each people has its own cultural-historical background, which differs from those of other peoples. In view of the fact that the concept of modernity is drawn from a cultural-historical background, it is unavoidable that this concept has - besides objective - subjective and ideological elements inherent in any cultural-historical background. The difference between the cultural-historical backgrounds of peoples leads to difference between models of modernity and, consequently, to difference

between the subjective and ideological elements of the respective models of modernity. Hence, it is unavoidable that the model of modernity among a people is different from those of other peoples.

It needs to be mentioned, however, that in spite of the fact that the Western model of modernity is a product of the Western historical-cultural background, quite a few aspects of this model are value-neutral, hence it can apply to all societies, which can adopt them without fear that this would involve Western cultural invasion of non-Western societies.

Moreover, related to change in a concept's meaning is the extent of its being abstract or specific. People might accept a certain concept. The less abstract and the more specific a concept is, the more are the meanings people attach to that concept. For people to give various meanings to the specifics of a concept means that people are selective - consciously and unconsciously - in their understanding of a certain concept in its details. It is the people's cultural and historical backgrounds which determine for them the selection of the meanings of the specifics of a concept.

The transfer of a concept from one cultural-historical environment to another entails a change in its meaning. In its new environment, the concept tends to be misunderstood or it may take on a blend of part of the cultural-historical environment from which it is taken and the meaning of the cultural-historical environment to which it was transferred.

There is another reason for the impossibility of achieving the Western model of modernity in the context of Arab society. That reason is Western mastery of politics and the art of war. It is not possible to truly reconcile Arab and Western cultural-historical aspects in the shadow of Western domination, and that is because it would not be possible to have in the shadow of such domination a free interaction, which is the content of the word "reconciliation." And because of the impossibility of a free interaction, tension has remained

between elements of the Arab and Western cultural-historical systems.

In light of the preceding, the Western model of modernity is not and cannot be the only model for the world; it cannot be said that that model applies to all peoples.

Social sciences have their historical-cultural background. They come into existence in such a background and are influenced by it. Social and cultural values which social scientists espouse affect the content of their findings and their assessment of the evidence on which they predicate their conclusions. Therefore, it is impossible to achieve "value neutrality" in social sciences. There are various reasons for that. Phenomena which a social scientist chooses for examination are determined by what he conceives as socially important. Moreover, considerations of right and wrong influence social scientists. Consequently, their notions of social and personal justice and of a satisfactory social order affect their analyses of social phenomena. Additionally, in the analysis of purposive human behavior, fact and value cannot be disentangled, as value judgements inextricably enter into what seems to be purely factual or descriptive. Furthermore, value commitments enter into the social scientist's assessment of evidence.<sup>6</sup> Because of all these factors in the social sciences there is no "scientific method" in the sense of value-neutral writings. The "scientific method" bears the stamp of the reality in which it is formulated.

The "scientific method" in the social fields has an ideological background. Social sciences have a blend of objective, subjective and ideological elements. Western scientific social writings, which have served as a major basis of Western modernity and which wear the "cloak" of scientific method are no exception. A large portion of Western so-called scientific writings takes on the form of ideological theorization. The ideology of Western modernity has harnessed certain means, a major one being the so-called social sciences.



Consequently, it is incorrect to apply a "scientific method" formulated in a certain historical-cultural context to a different one. To do so would disregard the particular cultural-historical role in shaping and affecting the method and would mean voluntary or involuntary, visible or invisible acceptance of intrusion into a receiving historical-cultural reality of value-oriented features of the historical-cultural reality in which the method was devised. The quantitative approach in social research, for example, which is frequently employed in the West may not be a recommended method of research in some social fields of study in the Arab world. This approach hardly gives consideration to the historical dimension of the subject under study. The social, political, economic and national circumstances under which the West and the Arab people have been living make the historical dimension more meaningful to the latter than to the former. There still are questions which have not been resolved for the Arabs. A number of Arab causes would be served by taking into account the historical dimension. Hence, Arabs can ill-afford to adopt as research tools such approaches as the quantitative one, which do not do justice, at least in the Arab context, to the historical dimension. Additionally, it cannot be said that, because we do not know the nature of the models of non-Western civilizations, we cannot compare them with the Western model with a view to ascertaining which model is better than others. Moreover, it cannot be said that the Western model of civilization is ideal, characterized as it is by rampant materialism, exaggerated consumerism and neglect of the spiritual dimension of human relations, shortcomings of which some other non-Western models are free.

It is an acknowledged fact that the experience of Western modernity is an expression of European renaissance. Some Western philosophers themselves have criticized aspects of this model of modernity, as being just one of the expressions of European renaissance and not necessarily the best.

Given the fact that the Western model of modernity is a result of social, cultural and historical developments in the West, then this model has its relativity and particularity. The connection of this model to a certain period in Western society has made it lose its comprehensiveness and universal applicability.

A large portion of Arab thinkers accepted Western social writings about modernity without fully realizing the difference between the Western and the Arab cultural-historical backgrounds, and without fully grasping the fact that their acceptance of such writings has formed a conduit enabling Western subjective and ideological elements to penetrate the Arab system of values, creating intellectual tension and confusion and disorientation within the Arab state and social structure.

The acceptance by a large portion of Arabs, particularly intellectuals, of the Western model of modernity is due to various factors. Many Arab intellectuals and men of letters have pursued studies in the West and were influenced by it in style, thought and methodology. Arab intellectuals and men of letters were dazzled or charmed with aspects of Western modernity, and they rushed to accept, embrace and adopt many of its aspects. They did that without adequately knowing the ideological and subjective impact of the social, historical and intellectual background of the model of modernity, and the impact involved in the acceptance of such model on the Arab system of values.

What has facilitated for the enthusiastic adoption of the Western model of modernity by at least some of those scholars was a feeling of inferiority and powerlessness in the face of Western domination.

Many of those educated Arabs who showed interest in the subject of Western modernity and Arab-Islamic modernity were not familiar with important aspects of either form of modernity; nor had they an historical vision of the Western

model of modernity and, consequently, they had no vision of its relativity and particularity.

In writing about modernity and modernization, those educated Arabs did not take into due consideration the Arab social, historical, political and intellectual background.

Their rushing to embrace various aspects of Western modernity is one of the manifestations of intellectual dependency on the West, and an indication of the lack of in-depth and conscious Arab thinking.

Among the Arab writers who were blinded by Western modernity were those who depreciated Arab society and its values in general. Some of them denied - out of error, ignorance or bias - that Arab-Islamic civilization had codified justice, or had an established penal code, and that it had developed social, political and economic sciences. They alleged that those sciences had been developed recently, and they denied that that civilization had created any ethical theory.<sup>7</sup>

Such judgements contradict historical fact; they were passed by those writers without drawing on reliable sources, and without showing self-restraint, balance, a sense of justice and common sense, when writing about their society and civilization. In other words, they resorted to double standards, which is unacceptable in the study of societies. Had they taken the trouble of studying some of the old Arabic sources dealing with these subjects, they might have hesitated in uttering such arbitrary and extreme evaluations, showing contempt for their own society and lavishing excessive praise on Western society and civilization.

In a country whose rulers are not indigenous and who have not been assimilated into the society of that country, such rulers would be more ready to adopt foreign concepts indiscriminately. Muhammad `Ali of Egypt, his son Ibrahim Pasha and the rulers who descended from the Khedival family are an example. Muhammad `Ali's state to a great extent existed in a social vacuum; it used to control the society from outside of

it. The ruling elite in the time of Muhammad `Ali did not have strong ties to intellectual and cultural circles in Egypt, and they were far removed from the Egyptian masses; they held political power in a society where there was a gap between the rulers and the ruled in customs and traditions. Hence, the ruling elite were more tractable vis-a-vis European civilization. Had the ruling elite been of Egyptian origin or education they might have been of firmer determination and less tractable towards some unacceptable features of European civilization.

There was another factor for accepting major features of the Western model of modernity. That factor was that the writings about Arab modernity and renaissance were produced and the attempts at Arab renaissance were made under the shadow of Western political, economic, technological and military domination. In presenting their theses about Arab renaissance, they conformed to that domination, and also to the overpowering Arab state, which it also was adapting to many features of the Western model of modernity, which was spread and supported by Western states that enjoyed superiority in the above-mentioned fields.

Modern mass communication media - in particular television, because of the ease of comprehension through hearing and seeing constitute another important tool in encouraging and facilitating penetration of concepts derived from the Western model of modernity. It seems that in the Arab countries - and in the rest of the third world - too little attention was devoted to this serious question. It is also easier for concepts derived from this model and its values to penetrate, through modern mass media, the societies of third world countries, because this process of penetration takes place surreptitiously, without the coercion associated with the official political and military authority, as has been the case with the political and military domination exercised by some Western states.

Consequently, the subjects and concerns addressed by

Arab writings in philosophy and the social sciences disproportionately reflect concerns of Western societies in both their earlier and more advanced stages, at the expense of the economic, social and psychological concerns of the Arab peoples, who have not passed through those stages. Arab reality deserves better treatment by Arab writers.

This effort to accept the Western model of modernity has contributed greatly to creating a deep split between a large portion of Arab thought and Arab reality; i.e., that thought is unrealistic and unrelated to Arab reality. One contributory factor is the existing gap between the Arab state and Arab society, between Arab rulers and the Arab people. The more important reason is that those rulers have tried in many cases for ideological reasons to impose the Western model of modernity on people the majority of whom do not want this model, have no interest in it, do not understand it, or possess different social and life values or combinations of these factors.

For all the reasons mentioned in this article, the dominant image which we have formed about ourselves is the "image" which the West presents us with. It is the dominant West's consciousness, its conceptions, ideological-theoretical formulations which largely determine the image which we accept about ourselves and the political, social, economic and educational options available to us. I think that Arab intellectuals in their large, if not overwhelming, majority do not know their distinct original and true selves, and they "accept" many of the West's explicit and tacit assumptions, its designations and classifications, its determination of the path of their consciousness, its periodization of their history, and its view of their intellectual and social history. Let us call all these the Western "ideological theorizations" about the Arabs. These "ideological theorizations" are the product of various factors, foremost among which is the social, political, economic and ideological interaction within the West; these ideological theorizations are to a great extent a reflection of what this

interaction produces on the "things non-Western," including Arab society.

These ideological theorizations constitute an authoritative reference, a source of readings by the Arabs, creating a false awareness which is often incongruent with the Arab social, cultural and historical reality. A large portion of "modern" Arab thought depends on readings not free from ideological, theoretical and methodological reference frameworks alien to the Arab social, cultural and historical system.

A significant number of Arab intellectuals start their study of history through the relationships between their lost, hidden or defeated selves and the West. Many Arab intellectuals accepted the biased and erroneous pronouncements by a number of Orientalists about the Arabs, which are clad in a scientific and objective garb, whereas there is no objectivity nor vigorous "scientific method" in social studies; these are pronouncements which take assumptions of ideological theorizations as their point of departure.

In order to preserve the Arab collective self and to face the Western challenge which is represented, among other things, in introducing and spreading a false image of the individual and collective Arab being, it would be appropriate for Arabs to recognize this challenge, to know its nature, to revive and absorb the good features of the Arab heritage and civilization, and to defend the Arab collective self, by developing various defense mechanisms; these would include taking from the West what benefits us in facing its challenge, pointing out deficiencies in Western civilization, achieving of economic independence, social and political awareness and reviving features of significance to us in our intellectual and cultural heritage. If we can achieve that, we will have achieved some of our objectives, including ceasing to be naively dazzled by some aspects of the Western reality - afflicted as it is by many social and economic imperfections - which infiltrate Arab society.

It is impossible to know our genuine identity from the perspective of Western culture and from the perspectives of the social, economic and political options which have been determined for us by Western cultural dominance. And it is impossible to know our true identity so long as the determination of those options stem from the domination of Western culture over Arab culture, and as long as we do not see and know ourselves from the perspective of our culture and our true identity. We must know our true identity in all its dimensions; only then can we engage in determining our options in the various aspects of our lives.

*Taysir Nashif*

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#### Endnotes

1. Edward B. Tylor, *The Origins of Culture* (New York: Harper, 1958), p. 1. First published in 1871 as *Primitive Culture*.
2. Clyde Kluckhohn, *Mirror for Man* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1949), p. 17.
3. William Kornblum, *Sociology in a Changing World* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1988), p. 85.
4. Awakening, rise, advancement, progress, renewal, reform, renaissance, resurgence, revival, rebirth, modernity, modernization and other terms have been frequently used in the context of Arab and Islamic change forward. There are some common aspects in all these terms, and some of them were not infrequently used interchangeably.
5. *Webster's Third New International Dictionary of the English Language: Unabridged*. Philip Babcock Gove, editor in chief (Springfield, Mass.: Merriam-Webster, 1981), p. 1452.
6. See Ernest Nagel, "The Value-Oriented Bias of Social Inquiry," in *Readings in the Philosophy of the Social Sciences*. Edited by May Brodbeck (London: Macmillan, 1968), pp. 100-08; Ernest Nagel, *The Structure of Science* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1961).
7. Fadi Isma'il, *Al-Khitab Al-'Arabi Al-Mu'asir* (Herndon, VA: International Institute for Islamic Thought, 1991), p. 66.



## THE OBSTRUCTION OF PEACE

*The Obstruction of Peace: The U.S., Israel and the Palestinians*, by Naseer Aruri. Monroe, Maine: Common Courage Press, 1995. 357 pages. Index to 370. \$18.95 paper.

Aruri's book "*The Obstruction of Peace*" comes as a "powerful corrective" to the distortion and misrepresentation of history. It documents the truth of the Oslo accords and the plight of the Palestinian people. It exposes the hollowness of these so called Palestinian symbols of sovereignty (stamps, legislative council, self rule, authority, etc.). In actuality the Oslo Accords do not grant Palestinians any sovereignty over the land or over the people. The book predicted a year ago that Israeli officials would be touring the world establishing diplomatic ties with countries and conveying the message that the question of Palestine is over. Meanwhile refugees are living in inhuman conditions throughout the world while their permanent exile is finalized. Prisoners suffer the abuses of human rights, Jewish settlements are erected in the West Bank and Jerusalem, and the right to self-determination under international law is deemed ineffective. "*The Obstruction of Peace*," set the record straight the Oslo accords will not lead to a Palestinian state. The Oslo accords will not achieve justice. Rather it will be the conclusion in the story of Palestinian uprootedness from their homeland and the finalization of the exile of a people.



'*The Obstruction of Peace*' is divided into three parts. Part one: A Cold War Legacy, consists of four chapters; Part two: Marginalizing the Palestinians, consists of six chapters; and Part three: United States Middle East Policy and American Politics, consists of three chapters.

In Part I, Aruri skillfully develops a political-historical account of the evolution of the Question of Palestine in United States Middle East policy, since the 1940's. He gives a critical hard hitting analysis of United States Middle East policy within the context of the various doctrines adopted by American administrations. These doctrines include the Truman Doctrine (communist containment), the Eisenhower Doctrine (to polarize the region into pro-western and non-aligned nationalists), the Kennedy Doctrine (corollaries of limited nuclear war), the Nixon-Kissinger Doctrine (containment through regional influentials), the Carter Doctrine (incorporation of Egypt into this notion of regional influence to keep stability), and the Reagan Codicil (strengthening the Carter doctrine with increased military presence in the region). Despite the different doctrines, Aruri observed they all were premised on the "assumption that the United States has a title to the Arab world's petroleum resources, a privileged access to its markets and waterways . . ." (p. 31). With insightful analysis and global contextualization, Aruri illustrates that these doctrines were formulated to maintain the status quo in the U.S.'s favor even if by force and implanting the Zionist state to counter balance Arab nationalism and contain Communism.

With the massive United States troop deployment in the Arabian Peninsula and ensuing of the second Gulf War, the United States "completed the process of recolonization of the region . . ." (p.61). The United States response to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, Aruri points out, was an indication of how the "United States was going to respond to the much touted 'New World Order' ." (61). All possible diplomatic means to settle the Iraq-Kuwait incident were rejected by the U.S. It became apparent that the Saddam Hussein of post Iraq-Iran War, became more of a threat to the U.S. and Israel than Jamal Abd al-Nasser in the 60's. Aruri demonstrates convincingly that the

destruction of Iraq was the only objective of the U.S.'s massive deployment. The consequences of this war as Aruri demonstrated, "turned out to be the single most important factor, if not the real catalyst leading to the Madrid process and eventually to the Oslo-Cairo solutions which have yet to deliver the promised durable peace in the Middle East." (p. 69)

Global Middle East policy of the last forty years is skillfully digested by Aruri to discern two approaches to this notion of a 'peace process': (1) "a comprehensive settlement under international auspices" and (2) "a peace process conducted under United States supervision". (p.71). The author illustrates with detailed documentation and analysis that the five United States administrations "adhered consistently to the second approach, thereby thwarting an international settlement." (p.74). The Oslo accords are but the living proof of the "triumph of American unilateralism and the de facto approach to solving the question of Palestine" (p. 71)

In Part II, *Marginalizing the Palestinians* the author sketches the evolution of the U.S.-Israel relationship from "a client to a surrogate in the 1967 War, to a partner in the 1982 War, to a strategic ally since that war" and with this transformation, Aruri documents the "corresponding marginalization of the Palestine question". ( 116). These chapters show how the U.S. sponsored 'peace process' "was always aiming to peripheralize the centrality of the Palestine question and advance the bilateral dimension of the Arab-Israeli conflict". (p.111). Thus, the Camp David Accord's notion of comprehensive peace was a farce. Its only aim was to pave the road for the bilateral approach and hence an agreement between Israel and Egypt. This peripheralization that continued unabated under the Reagan period is well documented.

Aruri observes that the Reagan administration wanted to rid America from the "Vietnam syndrome" or the "legacy of restraint". To accomplish this task the Reagan administration initiated, what Aruri calls an "anti-terrorist crusade" and "counter revolution" policy, to destabilize governments seen to be close to the "evil empire". (p. 118). Israel was ; considered central in Reagan's global strategy. In turn,

Israel became "a conduit for funneling U.S. money, weapons, and training to the Contras", South Africa, and other counter revolutionary forces in Latin America and Africa. (p. 118) The question of Palestine within this context "paled in significance beside Reagan's global agenda in which Israel's counter revolutionary role was crucial". (p.119)

Nevertheless, with the outbreak of the Intifada, the Schultz plan was born. The Schultz plan consisted of "full autonomy, a transitional period, elections for a self governing authority, and some kind of association with Jordan..". (p.130). It precluded Palestinian right to self-determination, and the right of return for the displaced refugees. In fact, Aruri points out "borders, water resources, Jewish settlements and security, were deferred." (p. 130). Yet the Yitzhak Shamir government rejected the Schultz plan.

Later that year (1988) the PLO recognized Israel's "right to exist" and "renounced terrorism" and called for a two state solution. The Reagan administration's response was to open a low level dialogue with the PLO. The Yitzhak Shamir government rejected vehemently the U.S. constricted and low level PLO dialogue. With Shamir's rejection of all the Reagan proposals, Aruri notes, one would think the Israel-United States relationship would suffer. Ironically it did not. In fact, the Reagan administration speeded up the approval of some F-15 airplanes to Israel. With the incoming Bush administration, the Shamir government continued to stall and reject any Baker formulated framework for a peace agreement. The author demonstrates how all this was to change with the end of the Gulf War, altering the balance of power and the Middle East landscape.

The Gulf War dealt a serious blow to the political, economic and social well being of the Palestinian people, i.e. further marginalization. Due to long curfews, (as long as 37 days), the agricultural, industrial, and labor sectors of the Palestinian economy were severely hit, losing tens of millions in an already weak economy. 120,000 Palestinian workers on the Israeli side lost their jobs and the effect on Gaza was devastating. The Gulf War not only affected the Palestinians in the occupied territories but also those living in the Gulf

(especially Kuwait) who found themselves expelled.

With the U.S. victory, the official Arab support for the PLO was shaken. The post Gulf War period proved to be "no less than catastrophic for Palestinian national and human rights . . .". (p. 166). In the aftermath of the United States Gulf War victory, Aruri points out why the U.S. invested so much political clout to convene the Madrid conference and how this conveyance will consolidate the U.S. gains. The once rejected Baker plan, was resurrected after the Gulf War. Now with the "collapse of the Soviet Union" and "the destruction of Iraq", Bush saw the Arab-Israeli settlement as a national interest (p. 170).

The Gulf War broke the Arab consensus on Palestine. Aruri argues that the Arab world has never been so disunited. Thus, the outcome of the Gulf War broke the only means to pressure Israel for concessions. As a result of the Gulf War, Aruri comments, the question of Palestine was removed from the top of the Arab agenda. In sum, Aruri unquestionably proves that the outcome of the Gulf War changed the balance of power in the region to such an extent that it became impossible for the Palestinians to achieve the least of their inalienable rights under the United States sponsorship.

In 1993, it seemed that U.S. diplomacy failed in light of the impasse in the Madrid negotiations, but Oslo broke the deadlock and achieved the U.S. objectives. With the incoming Clinton Administration, the historic shake, the Oslo accords, became reality. Aruri demonstrates how the Palestinian struggle for national rights had been transformed during and after the Oslo negotiations to a struggle for municipal rights. The repercussions of the Oslo and Cairo accords, Aruri notes, are disastrous to the Palestinian people. Among other things, he explains how the 'peace' accords effectively divided the Palestinian people into three distinct groups: West Bank and Gaza, Palestine within the Green Line, and the Diaspora. Describing the hollowness of the Oslo agreement, Aruri notes that the accords only address a fraction of the Palestinian people (West Bank and Gaza). The accords effectively abrogate international law and United Nations resolutions for the creation of a Palestinian state and the withdrawal

from land taken by force. The signing of the Declaration of Principles deferred all major issues, refugees, Jerusalem, and colonial settlements for the future.

Actually, the negotiation deadlocks are not surprising says Aruri, "in view of the built in conflict over the meaning, objectives, and the desired eventual outcome of the Declaration of Principles." With the continuation of settlement activity in the West Bank including Jerusalem, with political prisoners still in prison, with death squads killing opposition activists, and . . . the Palestinians are the only losers in the game. Considering Israeli behavior and numerous statements by top PLO officials it became apparent, that when "Palestinian negotiators initialized the Declaration at Oslo, their hope was that the spirit of the agreement, as they conceived it, would ultimately overcome disagreements over the letter of it." (P. 230). This was only a sign of what Aruri calls "political naivete" on the part of the Palestinian negotiators.

The Palestinians want a state. The Israelis want to give the Palestinians; limited self rule. The Declaration of Principles facilitated the Israelis end result while the Palestinians signed their fate to their conqueror and legitimized the relabeling of occupation to self rule. With all these devastating developments, the Palestine body politic is in crisis. Examining the present state of the Palestinian polity, Aruri demonstrates how the seven branches of intelligence services in the Palestinian Authority, means that the Palestinian polity will become a culture of security. With the security apparatus that is intolerant to dissent and the authoritarian nature of the decision making process, the state of human rights in Palestine is very sad.

Chapter One of Part III examines the Jewish vote since the 19th century and the emergence of the Zionist Lobby in the 1920's and 1930's. Aruri observes that since Israel came into existence "bipartisan support for Israel" ... "has been the norm". (p.249). A debate on U.S. Middle East policy in the political arena has never existed. Unlike other foreign policy debates (South Africa, San Salvador, etc.), Aruri brilliantly observes that U.S.- Middle East Policy was "relatively free from conceptual and ideological controversies". (p.249). The author

illustrates that the platforms of both parties on Middle East Policy are the same, differing only in terms of emphasis not content. The start of this bipartisan support began in 1944, when both the Democratic and Republican parties endorsed the Baltimore program. The Baltimore program called for unrestricted Jewish emigration to and colonization of Palestine to facilitate the establishment of a "free and democratic Jewish common wealth". This pattern of unquestioning bipartisan support of Israel up until the 1992 election is skillfully documented. To the Zionist lobby in this 'Jewish vote' bipartisan heaven, it became a matter of who they were more comfortable with.

Aruri examines the presidential campaigns of Carter, Reagan, Bush, and Clinton and their stands on Israel. Sifting through tons of rhetoric campaign slogans he found a common denominator in the rhetoric, that is, NO to a Palestinian state, and no dialogue with the PLO nor will the PLO play any role in a peace conference, Aruri calls this the 'three nos'. After the election of these candidates, the author looks at instances of conflict between each administration and the State of Israel. These instances of conflict included Carter's conflicts with Begin over the convening of an international peace conference in 1977; Reagan and Begin's conflict over the sale of AWACS to Saudi Arabia in 1981; and Bush and Shamir's conflict over loan guarantees.

Next, the hostility to Arab-Americans in U.S. presidential campaigns is highlighted by the author. With both parties scrambling to get the Jewish vote in the 1972 campaign, Walter Mondale pledged to transfer the American Embassy to Jerusalem. In the 1980's, Gary Hart repaid a \$700,000 loan from First American Bank when he discover the bank was owned by Arabs. Joe Kennedy (D Mass.) returned a contribution from former Arab American Senator, James Abourezk.

Next Aruri examines the Israeli lobby and PACs, listing their huge contributions and influence in the congress where they are called 'the lobby'. He then turns his attention to the Congress' "campaign of delegitimization" of the PLO. He contextualized the PLO within the international community and points out that by 1988 there were more countries that recognized the PLO and gave it diplomatic

representation than had the state of Israel. Yet the constricted and low level American dialogue in 1988, after the PLO 'renounced terrorism' and accepted Israel's right to exist, was seen as the ultimate of legitimacy. Rather than take this unilateral recognition of Israel toward reconciliation, Israel and its U.S. lobby waged a campaign of misinformation and delegitimization of the PLO. In this section, Aruri documents how the United States congress worked to undermine the PLO's recognition in the World Community and effectively denied human rights protection for Palestinian refugees. Aruri, among other examples, examines H.R. 2145, a 1989 bill prohibiting U.S. contributions to the U.N. if "full membership was granted to any organization or group that did not have the 'internationally recognized attributes of statehood', aimed at preventing the PLO from becoming a member of the World Health Organization. In so doing, congress was attempting to effectively deny Palestinians living under occupation health care because they are not covered under the Israeli health care system. Congress' lobby threatened to cut U.N. funding if the Food and Agricultural Organization cooperated with the PLO in agricultural projects in the occupied areas.

The author proceeds to document the pro-Israeli members of congress and their attempts at minimizing the contracted and low level U.S.-PLO dialogue. For instance, Senator Connie Mack's (R-Fl) bill that eventually became the Commitments Compliance Act of 1989, in addition to viewing the PLO as a terrorist organization listed numerous requirements that the PLO must meet for the dialogue to continue. In May 1990, a group of Abu Al Abbas' commandos raided an Israeli beach in response to an Israeli soldier's massacre of seven Palestinians at Rishon Le Zion. The anti-dialogue lobby was able to pass Resolution 138 which requested the U.S. suspend its dialogue with the PLO unless Arafat expels Abu Al-Abbas. Although Arafat condemned the raid he did not expel Abu Al Abbas from the executive committee. Consequently the U.S.-PLO dialogue was suspended. Aruri continues to examine the evolution of congress' notion of 'compliance' throughout the 1990's even after the Oslo accords.



Lastly, in part three, the author addresses the question of Jerusalem. The legal status of Jerusalem is set within the context of international law, i.e., U.N. partition resolution and East Jerusalem as occupied Arab land. Discussing the Bush controversy linking Israeli loan guarantees with illegal settlements activity in the West Bank and Jerusalem, Aruri skillfully discerns two asymmetric U.S. positions on Jerusalem. He labeled these positions (i) the symbolic position and (ii) the presumed position. The symbolic position was the international community position articulated in General Assembly Resolution 2253 of July 4, 1967, calling on Israel to "rescind the annexation and enlargement of Jerusalem's borders". (p. 315). This symbolic position was effectively transformed into the presumed policy by successive U.S. ambiguities. The author shows that while the U.S. rejected Israeli sovereignty over all of Jerusalem and recommended its final status to be negotiated, it looked the other way "while Israel took physical and legal steps which left nothing to negotiate about." Aruri points out how the expropriation of Arab land surrounding Jerusalem, the demolition of Arab homes, and the continued building of illegal settlements, went unabated, while the U.S. expressed the "occasional statement upholding the symbolic position". The Judization of Jerusalem, Aruri observes, is still going on today even with the peace negotiations.

As to congress and the Jerusalem controversy, Aruri examines the powerful opposition to Bush's comments on the loan guarantees and East Jerusalem and the triumph of the Israeli position advocated by congress. Aruri illustrates the policy consideration behind the expanded settlements around Jerusalem as to "give a unique character distinguishing it from the West Bank. Jerusalem then would become Jewish physically, ethnically, and politically". (p. 331). The new United States policy on Jerusalem is to leave it for the parties to negotiate themselves, if there is anything left to negotiate.

The conclusion summarizes the U.S.-Israel strategic tools in the 'peace process'. The U.S. strategy, Aruri points out, was first to put forth a separate track notion, i.e., a separate peace with the Arab states not "contingent on the necessity of meeting Israeli obligation to the



Palestinian people". And second, to put forth this notion of stages, i.e., "normalizing relations with the Arab world and reorganizing its occupation of Palestinian land, with Yasir Arafat's full complicity and active cooperation".

In addition to the rigorous scholarship and masterful analysis, "*The Obstruction of Peace*" is most significant in its exilic perspective. The Question of Palestine is the Question of Exile. The Palestinians feel Edward Said noted, "that they have been turned into exiles by the proverbial people of exile, the Jews."<sup>1</sup> Unlike the Biblical exile, the Palestinian exile is not legend or myth. It is not a mystical longing. Palestinian exile is reality it is the exile of today, where memories of olive tress, orange groves and the smell of homemade bread are not distant. It is the exile of a people still holding deeds to their land and keys to their conquered homes. It is the exile of the greatest exodus and forced expulsion in modern history. It is the exile of a people gazing at their orange groves and olive trees from the neighboring mountains, tormented because they are not allowed to cross and go home. Naseer Aruri is part of this exile. In "*The Obstruction of Peace*", he narrates the historical-political underpinnings that led to the Palestinian exile.

Aruri has been living in the United States and teaching in American higher education since the 1960's. He is well acquainted and versed with Western culture in general and American culture in particular. Yet he writes as an Arab-American or Palestinian-American. He is an insider/outsider. He is an exile author, a marginalized intellectual addressing the plight and marginalization of the Palestinian people, his people.

In his "*Reith Lectures*", Edward Said discussed this notion of exile. According to Said "exile and marginality" can have advantages. An exile has a "double perspective that never sees things in isolation". As a result Said explains, an intellectual's "experience is always counterposed with another, therefore making them both appear in a sometimes new and unpredictable light . . . ". This leads to a more "universal idea of how to think, say, about a human rights issue in one situation by comparison with another."<sup>2</sup> Secondly Said contends, as an

exile intellectual you tend to "see things not simply as they are, but as they have come to be that way. Look at situations as contingent, not as inevitable, look at them as the result of a series of historical choices made by men and women, as facts of society made by human beings, and not as natural or god-given, therefore unchangeable, permanent, irreversible."<sup>3</sup>

Comparativism, humanism, universalism, courageousness, and the notion that there is no permanency to injustice rather a continuous struggle for justice and change, are inherent in the advantages Said discerned in being an exile. These notions resonate lucidly throughout "The Obstruction of Peace."

Naseer Aruri, the exile, has spent his entire career as a human rights activist. He is a member of the Board of Directors of numerous Arab and International human rights organizations. He was a three-term member of the Board of Directors of Amnesty International, U.S.A. 1984-1990. Thus the theme and the context of human rights pervades the whole book. The book is a riveting account of the Palestine plight within the U.S.-Israeli context. In turn, the United States role in the Palestinian plight is highlighted. It is an unfortunate truth, and as an insider/outside Aruri proves beyond a doubt, that justice has no place in U.S. politics and that American policy toward Palestine is evidence of this observation. Only by an intellectual exile could such a powerful critique of American political culture be written. And only by an intellectual exile could such insight into the intimacy of the Palestinian plight be written.

The book demonstrates that this latest 'peace process', under the guise of a "diplomatic break through" is nothing but a chapter in the ongoing distortion and misrepresentation of history aiming to "countenance and reconfirm the exiting situation" of occupation and persecution of the Palestinian people. Aruri demonstrates that this notion of a 'peace process' was a thirty year old U.S.-Israel plan that ripened with Oslo. Emphasizing that Israel has succeeded in determining the "framework and the scope of the 'peace process'" Aruri points out that all the major issues, refugees, Jerusalem, and settlements have been deferred to the final status that will reflect the

Declaration of Principles, i.e. disaster to the Palestinian people. Aruri illustrates how the Oslo accords exempt Israel from all legal responsibility for "acts committed during 28 years of brutal occupation". In light of Oslo, Israel is not responsible for reparations, compensation for expropriation of land, Palestinian displacement and the brutal consequence of decades of occupation. Moreover, Aruri notes how the Oslo Accords grant Israel jurisdiction in the West Bank and Gaza which supersedes the Palestinian Authority's jurisdiction. With convincing documentation and analytical insight, Aruri proves that this so called peace process has repackaged the occupation with PLO legitimacy. The author constructs the framework which predicts the repercussions of the Oslo accords to be devastating and will become more apparent in the coming years.

The documentation of the book is absolutely remarkable and exhaustive. This reflects the author's in depth knowledge of the topic and fluency in several languages. The steady progression of themes makes the book easy to read and reflects sophisticated organizational skills. I encourage any individual interested in the truth and the other side of the 'peace process', to read this book as a requirement. The depth and vastness of information contained in *"The Obstruction of Peace"* is remarkable. It will undoubtedly become a classic reference to the Question of Palestine written by an exile. Due to the rapid changes in this 'peace process', an update to *"The Obstruction of Peace"* is paramount. Nevertheless, next to Edward Said, another intellectual exile, Naseer Aruri is one of the most prolific critics of the so-called 'peace process'. *'The Obstruction of Peace'*, as Noam Chomsky described, is a "powerful corrective to illusion and misrepresentation that goes beyond the norm". Indeed, only an intellectual exile could go ; "beyond the norm" and as Edward Said rightfully observed, "force us to recognize the tragic fate of homelessness in a necessarily heartless world."<sup>4</sup>

*Abed Awad*

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**ENDNOTES**

1. Edward Said, "*The Mind in Winter: Reflections on life in exile*," Harper's, no . 269 (September 1984), p. 51.
2. Edward Said, "*Representations Of The Intellectual: The 1993 Reith Lectures*". London: Vintage, 1994, p.44.
3. Ibid, p. 45
4. Edward Said, *The Mind Of Winter: Reflections on life in exile* . p. 53

**“Israel  
is the only country left  
in the world that insists on  
remaining a colonial  
state -- one that has usurped the land  
and rights of another people and continues  
to subject them to oppression.”**

--Shulamit Aloni  
Ex-Israeli Minister

# THEY SHOOT POWs

Translated from Hebrew and Foreworded by  
**Dr. Israel Shahak\***

### Foreword

This collection of translations relates particularly to a sordid and disgraceful phase of Israel's military history--the routine murders of prisoners of war, fleeing troops and civilians in battlefield areas. While most of the world has a far better picture of the Israeli army from its slogan, "Purity of Arms" and for other reasons, the record now shows the war crimes of the Israeli army have been little different from those committed by other reprehensible armies in the post-World War II era.

The murders in the 1956 Sinai War were first exposed by Davar's correspondent Amir Oren who found the story of the atrocities buried in an obscure army journal couched in the most sterile language possible. The appearance of Oren's report could not be stopped by the army censorship because of its prior publication. However, the very lively discussion stopped a day after the publication of the last of the articles in this collection. (Some articles were published afterwards about the killing of Israeli POWs by Egyptians and Syrians.) According to my sources, heavy pressure was exerted by the [Israeli] government once it became apparent that the investigation could reach upward and implicate [Prime Minister] Yitzhak Rabin.

*Dr. Israel Shahak*

## **Mass Murders**

### **In 1956 Sinai War**

**Excerpt from Oren's Research Report**

**By Ronal Fisher**

It began on Monday, October 29, 1956, at exactly 16:59. Paratroopers' Battalion 890 under the command of Raphael (Raful) Eitan was parachuted on the eastern side of the Mitla pass, deep in enemy territory. This was the first moment of the war, to be known later as the Suez War.

There were 395 fighters, including the commander, Raful, who participated in the jump. While they were still hovering between heaven and earth, the soldiers identified two large tents on the eastern side of the Mitla pass. They did not open fire from the air nor were they able, at that stage, to determine exactly who was there. Later it became clear. They were civilians, Egyptian public works employees, who happened to be at the place where the Israeli army commanders decided to parachute their force. They were captured and taken prisoners.

Two days later, after the awaited link-up was made with Division 202, Sharon assumed command in Mitla and Raful's battalion was ordered to move on to Ras Sudar. The Egyptian workers who had been captured on the first day of the parachuting were not loaded on the trucks and did not join the battalion which began to move to the south in a convoy, nor were they transferred to Sharon's soldiers. In fact, none of the soldiers of Battalion 890 can testify to having seen them alive after the force packed up and left.

Lieutenant Colonel (reserves) Danny Wolf (known as Rahav), recipient of the Award of Valor<sup>(1)</sup> in the Six Day War, today admits that the Egyptian civil engineering workers were slaughtered on the second day of the campaign while the battalion was still isolated. Wolf, who later became the commander of the Shaked Elite Unit, was at the time a soldier in the company commanders' course in Battalion 890. If it had been up to him, he now says, the Egyptians would have

remained alive. On the other hand, there were the circumstances of that time. Wolf, like all who were there, does not like to talk about that part of the campaign, and has been careful to remain silent all these years. Now he is talking.

**Wolf:** "There were 20 or 25 men. I do not remember exactly how many. All were dressed in white *jellabas*. Road workers, poor guys. It is an extremely hard work in the middle of the desert. They whined from thirst and hunger. They could have been left there with some food and water, theoretically, but the truth is that we did not have enough water for ourselves. Don't get me wrong. I am not trying to find justifications for what we did. But the truth, any way you look at it, is that there was nothing we could do with them. We were about to move, we received an order to advance and they were stuck among us. Releasing them was inconceivable, because the last thing that any of us wanted to do, was to provide free information to the Egyptians about how to locate and screw us before the arrival of Sharon's force. The army had taken us and thrown us, Battalion 890, hundreds of kilometers inside enemy territory, without reinforcements or anything. It was not a simple situation. I personally would not have shot those workers in any case. Not even in our situation. But the people who did it, shot."

- *Did you see with your own eyes that the Egyptian workers were shot dead?*

"What do you mean, did I see it? About 300 people saw it, nearly the entire battalion. We stood on the hills when some officers took them one kilometer to the south, away from us. Then they started to mow them down. It was not a pleasant sight."

- *What did they do?*

"Some of them were frozen to the spot, some fell, some fled. Look, it was not a professional murder. I don't think that they all died. Perhaps some of them understood what was going on, got to their feet and ran to the desert. It is very likely that some of them survived."

- *Who shot?*

"Aryeh Biro, the commander."

- *Who gave the order?*



"Raful, the battalion commander."

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General (reserves) Aryeh Biro, 68, was discharged from the Israeli army ten years ago. He was known as "the Prussian officer" and the nickname was given to him for his toughness. Biro, a typical product of the forests where the partisans fought and of the concentration camps in Europe, was Raful's right-hand man through the 1956 campaign. Biro was thought to be Raful's identical twin, to the point that people would confuse of the two. The same looks, the same countenance of an expressionless peasant, the same style of speech, the same blind courage. Those who argued against their world-view used to say that they turned Battalion 890 into a band of Cossacks. Those who supported their values said that they had turned the men of 890 into courageous Jewish fighters.

For years, Biro did not speak about the events of the war. Now he has broken his silence, starting with what happened at the jump site.

**Biro:** "South of us, pretty close to the position we took, there was a quarry. There were exactly 49 people there, not 15, not 20 and not 30. All of them were road workers from the Egyptian public works department. Some were Bedouins and some were perhaps Egyptians. We tied their hands and led them to the quarry. They were frightened and shattered. Raful did not give us an explicit order and I did not ask for any. In any case, only an idiot would ask his commander for permission to do what was his duty to do. In any event I can tell you that Raful did not grieve over the bodies of the workers killed by us. He also didn't punish whoever it was that finished the job there and got rid of them. They were a burden, a pain in the butt, and until we finished them off we could not find the time to deal with the other matters. The stories about us of letting them run and then massacring them are nonsense. They died and that is that. One of them really did manage to flee with bullets in his leg and chest, but he came back several hours later on all fours. We did not understand why. Very quickly we found that he was simply thirsty. Instead of getting to the radiator of some truck, emptying it into his belly and waiting for an

Egyptian patrol to pass, the idiot came to me to ask for water. I am not responsible for the stupidity of the enemy and he quickly found himself among his friends. As to the question who fired and who did not fire at the workers, why is it important? Between you and me, the main thing is that they did fire."

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The battle of the Mitla began on the following morning, the third day of the war. Many from the battalion were wounded. But Battalion 890 was not destroyed or neutralized. On the fourth day of the campaign, with a smaller, hurt and angry force, they received the order to move forward into the desert, to Ras Sudar. From every aspect, that was an unexpected order. No one actually knew where the Egyptian divisions were located<sup>(2)</sup> and the intelligence reports and navigation maps were inaccurate. Nor did anyone know how to reach the destination and how to identify the place when they did arrive. In a convoy of nine old vehicles, and several captured ones and four jeeps, with Biro at the head, they went to seek the location of Ras Sudar. Like all those who went through the campaign, their feeling was that they were going to their death, venturing forward without any possibility of withdrawal. With this feeling and the pain over the loss of their comrades, the next massacre was only a question of time.

The Egyptians, who smelled the "red feet"--the nickname of Rafal's paratroopers--did not want to conduct a battle with them and simply fled. The feeling that battalion 890 was going towards its death was dispelled. They did not face organized Egyptian troops.

Lieutenant Colonel (reserves) Shaul Ziv, then aged 17, a soldier in Platoon 5 and later the commander of Sea Commando Unit 13, admitted that the events of Ras Sudar disturbed him for years. Ziv has refused, up to now, to speak of his memories of that campaign.

**Ziv:** "All in all, we were in a pretty good mood by the time we camped at Ras Sudar. The guys confiscated many booty vehicles from the Egyptian oil company and played around, driving wildly. The fact that we did not confront any Egyptian commando unit, anyone willing to battle us, was a relief on one hand, but on the other hand, the tension, the anxiety of those who were living war for the first time,

had not not been vented by actual fighting. I remember that my unit settled on both sides of the road, when suddenly a truck loaded with people appeared from a bend on the road. At first no one paid any attention to them. In fact, when I think about it today, if they had continued driving towards us without making a provocation, they would have passed us without our noticing them. But, apparently, they were frightened. They did not expect to find us in the middle of Sinai. One of them fired, out of hysteria, a few aimless bullets. Even before the truck came into our range of fire, it was obvious that we had to eliminate it. Whoever fires, as far as we are concerned, is the enemy from any aspect. The truck, I remember as though it were today, was open in the back, was hit in the driver's compartment by my rifle-fired anti-tank grenade, swung to the side of the road and halted. The people who were hanging on it, holding on to the doors or sitting on the hood, flew several meters in the air and were thrown onto the sand. My hit was right on target, and one minute later it was quiet. I looked at the truck and at the people in it. They were stunned. They did not move. Already then I could see that they were *Fedayin* [Palestinian guerillas]. Possibly there were also Egyptian soldiers there but not in uniform. In any event, it was certainly not an organized Egyptian army unit.

I turned back to dismantle the grenade rifle and all at once I saw our unit assaulting them. It was a mad scene. Biro gave the order, and each person caught the gun closest to him and fired. It was a huge round of fire that shook the desert. I did not shoot, I only stood there and watched the truck and our guys, and did not grasp what was going on, why they were doing that. For me everything ended when my anti-tank grenade blew away the head of the truck driver. The cruel attack afterwards seemed totally uncalled for. The people in the truck simply remained standing and they absorbed hundreds of our bullets without responding, without moving."

Biro, the commander, does not deny the order given to attack the truck. He does not now even deny that the shooting was one-sided, but it is difficult to win over the impression that this changes the picture as far as he is concerned. He simply does not understand even

now how they managed to load so many people in one truck.

"I have developed a feeling of keeping the finger on the trigger," Biro said, "when I shot someone and he is hit, I feel it in my hand, between the fingers. But that time a strange thing happened. As soon as I gave the order to fire, I myself started shooting from a Carl Gustav rifle I had taken as booty at the Mitla. I started emptying clips into the people on the truck and for some reason I felt as though I hit a person with each bullet I fired, but still, they remained standing as though the bullets had gone in one side and left through the other without leaving holes in their stomachs. I was stunned. That was a big mystery to me. Only later, when I shouted to halt fire and went over to the truck, I understood what had happened. The truck was so crowded that the people inside did not have room to fall. Those who died, died standing up."

Shaul Ziv claims that the affair of the truck at Ras Sudar did not end there. In fact, it did not even really begin.

**Ziv:** "Sometimes, in the kibbutz, you can see a wagon loaded with cans of milk being dragged from the barn, after the day's milking, and if a can overturns and spills, the whole wagon begins to drip from all sides, within seconds. I remembered that when I stood there, next to the *Fedayin* truck after the attack. It was simply horrifying. Blood ran from every crevice in the truck in huge amounts. When the back door was opened, the bodies tumbled out one on top of the other, all at once. I estimate that there were 40-50 people there. It was difficult to count in the mess of flesh that formed there. They fell on each other, at the side of the road, next to the truck. All or most of them were dressed in white *jellabas*, which were not so white by then. I saw enough shocking scenes when I commanded the naval commando, but this was especially terrible. Even if I had seen worse things in my lifetime, that case was especially enraging because I could not bear the thought that we shot people without a battle. What was more terrible was that after we removed the dead bodies from the truck we found that there were about 20 people still living. Most of them were bleeding. One had a hole in the arm, another in the jaw but they were alive. I have no idea how they survived after that barrage of fire.

Perhaps it was due to the huge mass of people in the truck who, with their bodies absorbing one bullet after another, shielded those who managed to push back into the center. I don't know. In any case, I remember clearly that when the truck was emptied of the bodies, our guys tied the hands of those who were still alive. At that time I did not know what was going to be done with them and I was already concerned with entirely different matters. I think that I received an order to move to Sharm al-Sheikh and was hurrying to get my gear in order. Suddenly I saw our storage manager, H., who was never considered to be a big hero, and K., Biro's deputy, running towards the truck, climbing into the driver's compartment and starting to fire barrages inside. I froze. They did not stop for a second, they did not take a rest to change clips in their guns. They fired and fired and fired until their arms got tired. I do not remember whether any other guy joined them in that massacre, but I clearly remember the two of them standing in the driver's compartment and pounding the 20 prisoners tied in the truck. A bullet didn't hit one of the prisoners right, it went directly into the main artery in the neck and a fountain of blood spewed on their clothes, drenching them. I thought that it would never end."

K. and H. were personal proteges of the commander, Biro. Everyone knew that he liked them, that he had raised them, and that they had returned his favor on the battleground. In any event, that was all that what Biro wanted from them.

"I never forced soldiers to use a knife when they could use guns," Biro explained, "but killing with a knife was always my hobby. I am good at that. What someone else does not do in a day with a hundred clips and 1,000 bullets I did at night with one commando knife. K., a golden boy would sometimes go out with me at night to help me with the **holy work** with the knife. I turned H., whom no one expected to amount so much because he was just a chicken storage manager who was even afraid to parachute, into a real killer<sup>(3)</sup> in that campaign. I made a soldier out of him. Whether K., H. and others dealt with the *Fedayin* who were captured at Ras Sudar is not important, since no one is going to establish an inquiry committee

against the shooters. But if you are talking about facts, then there were exactly 56 men in the truck when they ran into us. Only six, not 20, remained alive after the barrage of fire. And yes, they too, as the rest of the men in the truck, went to sleep after that."

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On November 4, 1956, the paratroopers arrived at Al-Tur, after a lengthy drive from Ras Sudar. Only on the following evening, on the sixth day of the campaign, they began to move in a convoy south to Sharm al-Sheikh, to end the war. There is a huge controversy about what happened along those last 15 kilometers that separated them from Sharm al-Sheikh. Some people are prepared to swear that soldiers in Rafal's unit gave the Egyptians a lesson in looting, taking booty and mass killing, all in broad daylight.

In contrast to former isolated events, such as the affairs at Mitla or at Ras Sudar, which were then erased from the battle history books, the journey of Battalion 890 to Sharm al-Sheikh forced the Israeli army to construct a firm alibi for itself and even issue its own version. The reason was simple. The road leading to Sharm al-Sheikh was so strewn with dozens of dead bodies, one next to the other, sometimes even on top of each other, all of them were bodies of Egyptian or Sudanese soldiers who were killed without battle and then stripped of their possessions. It was a genuine slaughterhouse.

Besides, the paratroopers' conspiracy of silence was broken. The shocking scenes were seen by the soldiers of the 9th Division who arrived to the area at about the same time and they did not have to try hard to understand what had taken place.

The Israeli army version, as found in its various publications on the war, stated, "On its way to Sharm al-Sheikh, the Paratroopers' Unit confronted an Egyptian division, a small part of which began a battle with our troops and was eliminated in the course of exchange of fire. Most of the Egyptians were then taken prisoners and held until transferred to Israeli territory. If personal booty was taken, it was confiscated and burnt."

The former Chief of Staff, General (reserves) Moshe Levy was at the time the operations officer of Battalion 890. He totally denied

the claim that hundreds of Egyptian POWs were slaughtered in Sinai. Levi claimed that many Egyptian soldiers were shot on the way to Sharm al-Sheikh, but that everything happened according to the cruel rules of warfare. "This is the first time that I have heard the term 'massacre' in relation to the Suez War," Levy said, "the task of 890 was certainly to clean up the area from al-Tur to Sharm al-Sheikh and the Egyptian division coming from the south did not make their job any easier. At certain sections of the road a battle developed, and at other sections, the Egyptians chose to surrender and were taken in an orderly manner, to temporary prisons that had been prepared in advance in Sharm al-Sheikh. Later they were taken to Israel as POWs. As far as I know there was no situation when Egyptian soldiers raised their hands and were then shot by our troops. That is simply not true."

The historians Uri Milstein and Meir Pa'il, who hardly ever agree on anything, this time find themselves on the same side of the fence.

**Pa'il:** "The Israeli army was ashamed to issue a public announcement stating that its chief Elite Unit acted with such moral depravity, because for years our national conscience had been based on the comparison of our seemingly high moral standards in battle in contrast to the barbaric morals of our enemies.

"The fighters themselves understand very well that what they did along the Suez Canal was ignominious and harmful to the reputation of the Israeli army. But they are not hurrying to incriminate themselves and to put a black mark on their paratroopers' wings. In actual fact, what happened was that battalion 890 met a disintegrated and defeated unit of the Egyptian army in Sharm al-Sheikh, a unit which could not fight and was only seeking a way to be taken prisoner. If, nevertheless, there were several Egyptian soldiers who fired a bullet or two, no one really thought that they intended to fight. Rafal saw that he did not have enough men to put in charge of the gathering of the Egyptian soldiers, who wanted to surrender, and gave an order to kill all of them. All in all, there was nothing extraordinary there, as far as he is concerned. That man has a distorted value system which does not, and never did, have anything to do with the Israeli



army. For him, a soldier who takes a transistor radio as booty is a criminal. But a soldier who kills an Arab, with hands up or hands down, is blessed. In any way that you look at what happened at Sharm al-Sheikh, it comes under the heading of massacre. Even if you choose to use another term."

**Milstein:** "Division 9 and battalion 890 advanced towards Sharm al-Sheikh from different sides, competing to get there first. Between them, the Egyptian division was stuck, having entered the pincer without any possibility of escaping. In the course of their attempt to escape, the Egyptians lost all of their operational capabilities and fell into groups, thirsty, hungry, exhausted, and then into the hands of Rafuf and his soldiers. The men of Battalion 890 understood that nothing would be done to them if they eliminated a few dozen or a few hundred POWs, as long as they won the war and returned home as heroes. Rafuf only wanted to reach Sharm al-Sheikh first before Division 9 and did not have the time to deal with prisoners. Therefore, nearly every Egyptian who confronted him and his soldiers was eliminated in the course of the advance to the south."

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The paratroopers themselves counted 168 bodies of potential POWs, when they returned on their way from Sharm al-Sheikh to al-Tur and before they got on the planes homeward. The men had been shot, sometimes in the back while fleeing and certainly not in the course of a battle.

That figure, never published previously, is well remembered by Danny Wolf: "They fell on us in their hundreds, loaded with crates of grenades. We were only 80, maybe 100 fighters with five wrecked armored trucks that hardly moved. That was what was left of the battalion after we crossed Sinai, 800 kilometers into the desert, when suddenly the Egyptian soldiers appeared before us. I thought to myself years later that if they had wanted to annihilate us, they wouldn't have had to fire even one bullet. It would have been sufficient if they had run towards us and overrun us en masse. Yet, somehow, the Egyptians were broken and defeated enough to have no thought of an aggressive attack."<sup>(4)</sup>



"It did not even occur to them. We met them in small groups. One time seven soldiers, then ten, once 15. Individuals among them fired, the majority simply ran into us or into the desert as if bent on suicide. I don't know how long it had been since they had seen a drop of water, but when we met, then they had already lost human dignity. We tried to gather them as prisoners but they kept coming, like waves. At some stage we understood that it would not end, and that we were stuck on with them, instead of being able to advance towards Sharm al-Sheikh.

"We then stopped counting and started mowing them down. It was madness. We fired at anything that moved. We massacred them until our souls left our bodies. Marcel Tobias,<sup>(5)</sup> the deputy commander who raced ahead, simply stood them, stripped them of weapons and then shot them. Later we also took watches, rings, wallets with Egyptian money and got at the next group. It got more sophisticated with every kilometer we advanced. I saw guys stripping Egyptians of everything they had on them while alive because it was easier and only then shooting them. That way they could collect more booty in less time, without having to handle the bodies.

"When we reached at the sections of the road which Marcel or Biro had passed, the Egyptians already knew not to stand still and they tried to flee. They knew that they would not find any water or captivity from us and that if they stood still they would be slaughtered and even their underpants would be taken from them. We were technically incapable of taking hundreds of POWs while moving in enemy territory but even if we had to kill them, why should we rob them like animals? Where did the combat morality, conscience, purity of arms and the values that we were taught disappear? I do not know. I do not have a good answer to that. I only know that my trauma from Sharm al-Sheikh affected me years later when I was put in command of the Shaked Commando Unit. Then I told my soldiers that whoever would shoot a prisoner or loot him, I would personally shoot him dead. And I meant every word of it."

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The following testimony of Sharm al-Sheikh's affair should be

included, in order to understand what happened there. Colonel (reserves) **Amos Ne'eman**, who was Wolf's commander in that campaign said: "We were like a hurricane that absorbs power and then crushes everything that it takes hold of. Call it a spontaneous outburst, call it pulling out the plug. I don't know. I only admit that in those moments it did not occur to me even once to stop killing in order to take prisoners. I changed clips in my Uzi like a crazy man, without even feeling it, and chased the Egyptians into the dunes. We conducted manhunts and whoever managed to escape my barrages when he ran into the desert, was alive only by a miracle. If I try to understand why our fingers were so heavy on the trigger, my only explanation is the hatred for the enemy. I did not hate them in the Six Day War nor in the Yom Kippur War, but in the Suez War I wanted to break their bones, I wanted to slaughter them all...

"I was torn up inside. On one hand there were the values of *Ha'shomer Ha'tzair*, the Mapam youth movement. On the other hand there were Raful and Biro, who taught us to despise the enemy. I went to war with a cup full of revenge and I emptied it completely. I remember that only three kilometers from Sharm al-Sheikh, I woke up, came to my senses and fully understood what I had done in the last hours of the war. It happened on a bend on the main road. An Egyptian command car halted 40 meters away from me. An Egyptian officer came out of it, stood there, sent a hand to his belt and took out his pistol. I raised my gun and within seconds I had him in my sights. Suddenly I saw that instead of shooting at me he put his gun to his head and shot himself. When we advanced further, I stopped for a minute, got out of the armored vehicle, and took his gun as a souvenir.

"At al-Tur, one minute before we got on the planes to go home, Raful asked that a special unit inspection be organized. We did not understand what was going on. Raful did not speak, he just laid out blankets on the ground, in silence and looked at us full of rage. Biro came to his senses first and shouted, 'Everyone empty out the booty, now.' Raful was very sensitive about this issue. When he discovered that the guys had taken watches and money from the

Egyptians, he thought he had only one of two choices. To shoot us all or to burn the stuff in Sinai and never mention the affair again. I think, incidentally, that it happened after someone told him that Areyeh Biro had fired at one of our soldiers, who was caught red-handed, emptying the pockets of a dead Egyptian soldier. Only by chance did Biro missed by a few inches and the man survived. The blankets that Raful laid out were full within minutes. There was everything in them. I went over to him and asked for permission to keep the pistol of the Egyptian officer as a souvenir. He nodded his assent, then tied the blankets into a huge bundle, poured gasoline over it and set it on fire."

Aryeh Biro, on a looted Egyptian vehicle with a flat front tire, drove back and forth on the Ras Sudar-Sharam al-Sheikh axis, to make sure that his unit had done the job properly. He remembers the inspection at al-Tur, although not exactly as Ne'eman did. Biro claimed that he allowed each soldier to take something home. Usually, two camel blankets, but no more. At the same opportunity, incidentally, he also graciously admitted that he shot at one of the unit's soldiers who was looting.

**Biro:** "A great shame. I have no idea how I missed him. I aimed directly at his stomach. He had more luck than brains. I told them at once when the war began, 'No personal booty.' I also told them that if I wanted them to take booty, I would notify them in advance. Whoever did not listen, did not obey orders and was caught red-handed, would immediately be caught in the sights of my gun. Besides looting, everything else was insignificant. For example, purity of arms. It is not true that Raful and I do not respect this rule. We certainly consider it to be a supreme value and we were at pains to explain that to soldiers at every opportunity. Purity of arms means that the gun should always be clean, polished, professionally handled and always prepared to shoot at anything that moves. In the same context, let me say that it is not true that Raful and I agreed to kill prisoners. Absolutely not. We gave an explicit order prohibiting that, but at the same time we said that battalion 890 will not take prisoners. Now everyone could understand whatever they need to understand.

"The truth is that I hate wars very much, and I have long ago

reached the conclusion that nothing good ever comes from them. Neither for the winners nor for the losers. But when I go to war I go to kill. Then I don't bother with any stories about conscience or morality. War is not for amateurs. A paratrooper, who wants to ponder whether in this or that case it is permitted or prohibited to shoot should go and study philosophy.

"We found a cell, in which there were an Egyptian officer and two sergeants. I ordered that they be taken alive for questioning. The old song was repeated. They begged for a drop of water and I wanted information from them about the size of their forces, waiting for me in Sharm al-Sheikh. My intelligence officer tried to make them talk, but they only repeated the same words again and again, 'water, water, water.' I did not intervene at first, until I was fed up with that nonsense. I pushed the intelligence officer aside, took my canteen, opened it and slowly spilled the contents on the floor in front of the Egyptian officer's face. I told them that whoever opened his mouth and began speaking would get what was left in the canteen. One of them broke down and talked. I closed the canteen, put it back in my belt, took out my pistol and gave each one of the three a bullet in the head.

"I knew that I had given my guys terrific mental preparation. I do not know what my soldiers remember today, how clear their memories are, although they are younger than me. All in all, they were pretty scared. For some of them it was their first meeting, close up, with death. I suppose that many little things grew in their minds to huge proportions. Some of them, who later became senior and excellent commanders in the Israeli army, got hit with my stick in Sinai, because they did not always understand what I wanted. On the other hand, I loved them with all my heart and I feel hurt for every scratch they got. Their conduct in Sharm al-Sheikh, except for the looting, by the end of the war, turned them into full-blown fighters in my eyes. Incidentally, 20 years later, I happened to command the Sharm al-Sheikh area again. Every time passed by the main road I would look aside to see between the crevices in the rocks, very high up, the many skeletons of the Egyptians whom I shot. How did I know

that those were my skeletons? Because only I was a good guy and let them throw down their weapons, and escape as far as they could before I mowed them down. I knew that if I shot them, they would stay there like a red banner, to remind the Egyptians for all time not to mess with us".

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#### How Many Were Killed?

According to testimony from various sources, the paratroopers killed 273 Egyptians without a battle. As to Mitl, Lt. Colonel (res.) Ariyeh Biro says, "There were exactly 56 men in the truck when it ran into us. Only six, not 20, remained alive after the barrage of fire. And they too, as were the rest of the men in the truck, put to sleep." On the road to Sharm al-Sheikh the paratroopers counted 168 bodies. Some Egyptians were shot in their backs while fleeing, without a battle." <sup>(6)</sup>

(*Maariv*, August 8, 1995)

#### Notes

1. The highest award in the Israeli army.
2. In my view this is untrue. According to my sources, the French army told the Israeli army that all Egyptian units had already received an order to retreat to Egypt as quickly as they could.
3. A term of praise.
4. They were broken by the stupid order to retreat blindly.
5. Regarded as a legendary hero.
6. To the best of my information, at least 2,000 were murdered.

## And Mass Graves

In 1967 Six-Day War, Egyptian POWs  
Ordered to Dig Graves, Then Shot by Israeli Army  
By Gabby Bron \*

It was the publication of the claims, made by Dr. Aryeh Yitzhaki,<sup>(1)</sup> about what really occurred during the Six Day War [June 1967] that caused me to recall what had happened and what I and my comrades had seen during my reserve service.

On the third day of that war we saw Egyptian POWs being executed after a "court martial". The explanation given to us was that those killed were Palestinian "*Fedayin*" fighters from the Gaza Strip who had disguised themselves as soldiers in order to escape from our forces". I witnessed their executions with my own eyes in the morning of June 8, 1967 in the airport area in al-Arish, Sinai. This was where the headquarters of the brigade commanded by General Israel Tal, in which I had served, were located.

On that morning we heard that hundreds of Egyptian POWs were being held in the headquarters and we had time to go to look at them. About 150 POW's were held in an open building serving as a cover for airplanes, surrounded on three sides by high sand-bag embankments. They were densely crowded and sitting on the ground with their hands on the back of their necks.

Adjoining the prison compound, guarded by military police, there were two men sitting at a table. They wore Israeli army uniforms and steel helmets with faces almost entirely covered by sun glasses and khaki-colored handkerchiefs. Every few minutes, the military police took one of the POWs from the prison compound and escorted him to the table. A short conversation, which we were not able to hear, was then conducted. Following it, the POW was escorted by two military policemen to a place behind the building.

I followed the procedure. The POW was escorted to a distance of about 100 meters from the building and given a spade. I watched

the POW digging a big pit which took about 15 minutes. Then the policemen ordered him to throw out the spade. When he did so one of them pointed his Uzi gun at the POW inside the pit and shot two short bullet bursts, consisting maybe of three four bullets each. The POW fell dead. After a few minutes another POW was escorted to the same pit, forced to go into it and was also shot dead. A third POW was brought to the same place and also shot dead. Since the process was repeated a number of times, the grave was filled up. I witnessed about ten such executions.

We were standing there, near the place where the POW's were being held and we watched silently. The fact that a number of soldiers were watching the spectacle was apparently unwelcome because after a time Colonel Eshel, the commander of the communication battalion of the brigade, appeared and shouted at the soldiers, ordering them to leave. When we didn't show any willingness to obey, Colonel Eshel pulled out his personal revolver and threatened us with it. Raising his voice even more, he was able to get the soldiers to obey, including me.

The reserve soldiers who heard about what had happened were horrified,<sup>(2)</sup> and about the noon an officer, whose identity I cannot recall, came to explain to the reserve soldiers that the men of the Military Intelligence were identifying "*Fedayin*" fighters of the Gaza Strip who had murdered Jews and disguised themselves. At that time of the continuing war, it seemed a reasonable explanation.<sup>(3)</sup> The day after, a rumor circulated that, in another al-Arish location, "hundreds of Egyptian POWs who interfered with the advance of our forces", were liquidated. Dr. Aryeh Yitzhaki must be referring now to this rumor as an established fact.

*(Yediot Ahronot, August 17, 1995)*

\* Dr. Israel Shahak, a Holocaust survivor and retired professor of chemistry at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, is chairman of the Israeli League of Human and Civil Rights.

**Notes**

\* A journalist of pronounced right-wing views.

1. The reference is to the well-authenticated claims made by Dr. Yitzhaki and published a day before, that the elite unit "Shaked Patrol" of the Israeli army, then commanded by Benjamin Ben-Eliezer (now the Housing minister in Rabin's government), had murdered a number of

- Palestinians serving in a special battalion of the Egyptian army. These claims implicate Rabin who was the Chief of Staff at that time.
2. The older reserve soldiers of the Israeli army are apt to be shocked by crimes callously committed by the younger (18-21) draft soldiers.
  3. I don't know why this outrageous murder seemed "reasonable" to Bron and his comrades at the time. I strongly suspect that an order was given "to weed out" Palestinians serving in the Egyptian army and to murder them after establishing their Palestinian identity through their dialect--the real purpose of the short conversation described above.



# **ANTI-ARAB RACISM IN THE UNITED STATES**

**A PRELIMINARY REPORT FOR 1995 SUBMITTED BY THE ADC\***

## **I**

### **ANTI-ARAB DISCRIMINATION AND "RACISM" DURING 1995**

Anti-Arab discrimination, stereotyping and hate crimes continued unabated during 1995. On a daily basis, the American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee ("ADC") received reports of the problems confronted by Arab Americans and Arabs resident in the United States. These range from the indignity of racial, ethnic and religious slurs to discrimination in the work place to life-threatening hate crimes. Arab Americans are sometimes specifically targeted on account of ethnicity, but they also suffer the effects of the general anti-immigrant and anti-foreign nativism sweeping across the nation.

#### **1. The Oklahoma City Bombing**

This year the largest outbreak of anti-Arab harassment, threats, intimidation and violence occurred in response to the bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah federal building in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, in April. Initial news stories inaccurately reported that the suspects were "Middle Eastern looking men", and self-proclaimed "terrorism experts" rushed to the media to implicate Arabs and Muslims. Law enforcement authorities were somewhat more circumspect and less prone to attribute blame, stating they were "investigating all possibilities."<sup>1</sup>

In the absence of facts, news commentators filled the gaps with speculation, linking the bombing to images of the United States Embassy and Marine barracks in Beirut, the World Trade Center bombing and other Middle East-related violence. The media's reflex identification of terrorism with Arabs and Muslims led *USA Today*, for example, to run as its headline "Bomb consistent with Mid-East terror tactics." A *New York Times* column was titled "Beirut, Okla." *The Times* also reported the damning fact that Oklahoma City "is home to at least three mosques," implying that this fact could help to explain the bombing.<sup>2</sup> On April 21, the *New York Post* ran a cartoon featuring the Statue of Liberty with the inscription "Give us your tired, your poor, your huddled masses, your terrorists, your murderers, your slime, your evil cowards, your religious fanatics..." Next to the statue stand three turbaned men, one with a bomb, burning the American flag.<sup>3</sup> Terrorism "expert" Steven Emerson commented on CBS, "This was done with the intent to inflict as many casualties as possible. That is a Middle Eastern trait."<sup>4</sup> Tom Snyder, also on CBS, reported extensively on the presence of "Islamic students in Oklahoma." <sup>5</sup>

Hate speech was widespread on radio and television talk shows. Talk show host Bob Grant of WABC in New York told a caller: "What I would like to do is put you up against the wall with the rest of them and mow you down along with them, execute you with them."<sup>6</sup> Even after it was revealed that the suspects were not Mid-Eastern but Midwestern Americans, the media's prevalent anti-foreign bias endured as discussions focused on the question, "How could Americans commit such an act?"

The response of the public to this irresponsible journalism was an immediate upsurge of anger and violence directed at Arab and Muslim communities. All across the country Arab Americans felt fear, betrayal and alienation. They had to contend with changes of attitude, disparaging remarks and slurs regarding their ethnicity or religion. Many people stayed home and avoided public places. Muslim women with head-coverings (hijab) were insulted on the street. Children were kept home from school. At least 222 incidents of harassment were reported in a three-day period some of which are referred to in this

report.<sup>7</sup>

Oklahoma City resident Abraham Ahmed, a United States citizen, was detained and questioned by the FBI as he was leaving the United States to visit his family in Jordan. In London, he was arrested, strip-searched and interrogated. He was thereafter returned to the United States and detained by federal authorities for no apparent reason other than his ethnicity and/or his religion. As his home in Oklahoma City became a target for local anger, his wife ran for shelter to a neighbor's house.<sup>8</sup>

At the same time in Oklahoma City, a pregnant woman huddled in the bathroom with her two children in fear, as angry crowds grew outside, throwing stones and other objects at her house. Believing the loud noises were gunshots and terrified for her children, she began hemorrhaging. Shortly thereafter, her child was stillborn.<sup>9</sup>

Months after the bombing, Oklahoma City television station KFOR persistently tried to link an Iraqi refugee residing in Oklahoma City to the bombing, falsely claiming he was a Federal Bureau of Investigation ("FBI") suspect.<sup>10</sup> At the insistence of ADC, government officials confirmed that the man was not and had never been an FBI suspect. The Director of Public Affairs at the United States Department of Justice ("DOJ") told ADC that the KFOR reporter persistently called him to inquire about the Iraqi refugee, and she was repeatedly told her information was not correct. Nonetheless, the reporter maliciously pursued the story.

The legislative response to the bombing-- the resumption of efforts to pass the counterterrorism legislation-- brought a renewed threat of unconstitutional restrictions on the civil liberties of Arab Americans and Arabs resident in the United States. The bill would allow the use of secret evidence in *ex parte* proceedings to deport non-citizens in violation of even the most basic notions of due process -- such as the right to a fair trial, the right to confront your accusers and the right to confront the evidence used against you.<sup>11</sup> Such proceedings could be invoked even where the respondent has never been convicted or even charged with a crime, making it impossible to prepare a defense. Furthermore, the bill would punish constitutionally

protected political activities, such as fundraising for and association with certain organizations. It would even criminalize humanitarian donations, such as contributions to medical or social service agencies abroad which are associated with what the United States government designates as "terrorist" organizations. The very broad definition of "terrorism" in the bill could include almost any offense involving the use of a handgun, and therefore, by definition could apply to almost any organization in the world that has at one point engaged in armed struggle, increasing the likelihood of its being used as a tool to punish organizations which are politically unpopular with policy makers at a given moment. In testimony before congressional committees, ADC concluded that "the scope of the applicability of the provisions is so broad that it invites abuse and selective enforcement which we feel will be directed at the Arab American community, silencing protected speech and punishing lawful political activities."<sup>12</sup>

## 2. Hate Crimes

In a little over a year, at least seven American mosques were burned down or seriously vandalized. Mosques in Springfield, Illinois and High Point, North Carolina were hit by arson attacks. Vandals attacked a mosque in Huntsville, Alabama.<sup>13</sup> In September, a mosque near Atlanta was desecrated by satanic symbols and vandalized.

Arab Americans complain that local authorities often do not properly investigate hate crimes directed against their communities. In the Atlanta case, it was reported that the DeKalb County Police did not even visit the mosque until community organizations publicized the incident. A Muslim organization reported "Once media attention focused on the attack and on the lack of police response, a team of investigators soon arrived at the mosque." Shortly thereafter, a suspect was taken into custody. After the Illinois incident, authorities began investigating the individuals who attend the mosque. The apparent basis for the suspicion was that there were Muslims in the mosque on the night of the fire. What the police may not have been aware of is that *every* night at that time, Muslims gather in mosques all across the country for the "al-Isha" (night) prayer -- not to conspire criminal

activities.

Another problem is the failure of authorities to categorize these crimes as hate crimes, thereby foregoing the possibility of pursuing imposition of harsher penalties on the perpetrators. ADC recently conducted an inquiry into the investigations of local authorities regarding several hate crime incidents that had occurred over the year across the country.<sup>14</sup> In only one of the incidents had prosecution been sought against the perpetrators. However, not one of the incidents had been categorized as a hate crime. Admittedly, it may be difficult to obtain the evidence required in order to obtain a conviction or even to seek prosecution in these cases. Nonetheless, this should not preclude authorities from identifying hate crimes as what they are.

It is also reported that police or local authorities sometimes use a hate crime incident as an occasion to investigate the victims rather than pursuing leads regarding the perpetrators.<sup>15</sup> It was recently reported to ADC that worshipers at a mosque that was vandalized were later visited by FBI agents and questioned about their political beliefs and those of others who attend the mosque.

Two other recent incidents are illustrative of other types of hate crimes directed against Arab Americans:

In Northern Virginia, the home of a family originally from India was apparently mistaken for Arab and vandalized. The numbers "666" often used as a symbol for satanic forces -- were spray-painted on the family's front door. In addition, the words "F...you Arab" were painted onto their driveway. While, in communications with ADC, local police did refer to the incident as ethnic-related, there was no investigation because authorities state there were no leads.<sup>16</sup>

In Aurora, Colorado, ADC's Campus Chapter at Metro State College received a series of threats -- two anonymous threatening letters and a threatening phone call, as a result of the chapter's efforts to organize an "Arab Awareness Week." The Chapter President was later assaulted by two individuals on campus in an apparent effort to discourage the students from continuing with the scheduled activities on campus.

### **3. Violations by Law Enforcement Agents**

In a year when racism, corruption and misconduct among law enforcement personnel is headline news, Arab Americans have also encountered their share of problems. Some types of violations committed by law enforcement appear to emanate from a general distrust for Arabs and Muslims.

In Northern Virginia, an Arab American Muslim on the highway with his wife and children was pulled over for a traffic violation. The police officer was loud and abrasive, aiming his flashlight into their faces, shouting and frightening the children. He thereafter called in an investigation of the man for no apparent reason. The family was extensively delayed on the highway with no explanation. Clearly, the police treatment of the family was far in excess of the offense.

At a New York airport, an Arab American accompanied by women wearing head-coverings (hijab) was unloading luggage from his car when a police officer reportedly began shouting profanities at him, demanding he move his car immediately. Before he had time to move his car, he was struck several times with a nightstick.

In California, a cab driver was stopped for a traffic violation by police officers who began to harass and badger him with caustic remarks such as "Where are you hiding the bomb?" The man told ADC he was terrified that the officers might take their game a little further and arrest him for no reason.

### **4. Employment Discrimination**

Many Arab Americans face blatant discrimination in the work place, particularly in the form of disparaging ethnic epithets. To deepen the wound, courts often fail to recognize discrimination and thus, fail to redress the hurt and indignity these incidents cause. To illustrate, a federal district court recently found no discrimination in a suit filed by a seventy seven year old Arab American. In addition to evidence of disparate treatment, undisputed evidence entered into the record included the fact that the plaintiff's supervisor wrote "Ahab the Arab" and "works for Kadafi" on the man's unemployment

compensation form, attaching a cartoon of an Arab holding a camel. A co-worker testified that this became the joke of co-workers. In the opinion, the judge stated: " the undersigned does not believe that 'Ahab the Arab' is such an automatically pejorative term as to never be appropriate even in a humorous context among co-workers." The evidence was dismissed as "good natured-banter" and the opinion referred to the disparate treatment as "favoritism," as opposed to discrimination. In the appellate brief to the 6th Circuit Court of Appeals, ADC argued that the "fact that co-workers found the incident humorous did not elevate the incident to lawfulness. Racist and bigots often find racial slurs humorous." ADC added, "the song 'Ahab the Arab' referred to in the court's opinion, is known to have some of the most derogatory lyrics fraught with disparaging ethnic epithets and lewd stereotypes of Arabs."

On a similar note, the needs of Muslims in the work place continue to be overlooked. Muslims are often refused flex-time to accommodate their religious needs such as Friday prayer and Islamic holidays. While Christians would never be denied time in observance of Christmas, or Jews Passover, Muslim holidays are not accorded the same recognition. In Maryland an American convert to Islam was repeatedly harassed and humiliated by his supervisor in the presence of co-workers in response to his requests for flex-time and other requests for minor accommodations so that he could practice his religion. While the case was successfully mediated and compensation was awarded to him, the employer, a major U.S. medical facility, has yet to demonstrate any real willingness to correct the problem.<sup>17</sup>

The Arizona Ice Tea company reportedly fired its 21 Arab American salespeople after they complained about flagrant acts of discrimination within the company, including derogatory remarks about their ethnicity, jokes about terrorism and Islam, and refusal to extend flex-time for religious holidays such as Ramadan or the Eid. One supervisor was reportedly overheard saying, "It's time to clean all this garbage." The statement was apparently in reference to the Arab American employees.<sup>18</sup>

On "Bring Your Child to Work Day" in April, Rockwell



International, a military contractor, held a thoughtless and insensitive skit involving an American man dressed up as an Arab "sheikh" and using a mock Arabic accent. Rockwell later apologized in a letter to ADC.

### **5. The Judicial Response**

To a great extent, it appears that when discrimination takes place against Arabs and Muslims, courts have difficulty identifying it as discrimination. Courts also often fail to treat anti-Arab or anti-Muslim discrimination with the same gravity with which they would treat discrimination against other minorities or ethnic groups. To some degree, the failure of the government, whether, through law enforcement or through the courts, to respond to and punish discrimination against Arab-Americans almost serves to institutionalize the problem.

One Arab American attorney commented that because Arab Americans have been burdened by a "vicious and sustained propaganda campaign depicting Arabs and Muslims in the most grotesque stereotypes imaginable, it is nearly impossible for Arabs and Muslims to get a fair trial." Another Arab American attorney, addressing the difficulties confronted by the Arab Muslim male in custody proceedings over his children noted that the decision is usually against the father who is forced on the defensive and has the burden of surmounting "scores of mythical images about the 'Monstrous Muslim Male' as an abductor of children."

### **6. Security Discrimination**

A recurrent problem is the discriminatory treatment of Arabs and Arab Americans by airlines, airport security, and related security enforcement agencies in response to political events that transpire abroad. Arab Americans clearly recognize the need for enhanced security, particularly in times of political crises. Therefore they would support government actions in furtherance of that goal. Indeed, Arab Americans frequently travel to the Middle East to visit relatives, friends or to tend to business matters. Hence, as a group, they are



more vulnerable than most communities to any dangers in air travel. What they object to is when a moment of crisis becomes license to violate the civil liberties of innocent Arab Americans because of their ethnicity or religion.

In August, some airports instituted unprecedented security measures in response to information that certain individuals or groups abroad were planning attacks on American civil aviation. As in the past, innocent Arab Americans have been singled out for intensive scrutiny and subjected to humiliating treatment. Many Arab Americans reported to ADC that they are harshly questioned for no apparent reason. One reported that as he was being subjected to humiliating treatment, he was told by the security agent "he met the profile."

Although ADC requested that the government reveal the criteria for its "terrorist profile", it was denied that information on the basis of "national security." The Supreme Court has made it clear that ethnicity or religion would be an unconstitutional criteria for a profile. If ethnicity or religion is not the criteria, what then is the criteria and why is the criteria kept secret? Furthermore, how can citizens check the constitutionality of criteria that is kept secret? Arab Americans feel that they have a right to know what the criteria is that causes one person to be singled out and not another.

Beyond that aspect of the problem lies yet another which stems, in part, from the fact that airlines often hire private security agents who are, to some extent, performing law enforcement functions but who receive little or no training to perform such functions. Such training would enhance their understanding and respect for the civil rights of individuals.<sup>19</sup>

While ADC remains in a continuous dialogue with government agencies and significant gains have been made over the past fifteen years, there is yet a long road ahead for Arab-Americans while these matters are being tested in the courts.

## II

### STEREOTYPING IN THE MEDIA AND POPULAR CULTURE

#### 1. Stereotyping in the Movie Industry

The media and the corporate world continue to perpetuate and exploit grotesque stereotypes of Arabs and Arab Americans, thus contributing to anti-Arab sentiment among the general public. One such recent example is the 1994 Fox production "True Lies," featuring Arnold Schwarzenegger and Jamie Lee Curtis. The plot is centered around a group of murderous Arab terrorists intent on bombing major cities in the United States. The film, which continues to be shown on major cable channels, perpetuates the tired stereotypes of Arabs as violent, irrational terrorists and abusers of women.

Arab Americans across the country voiced their protest of the film by holding demonstrations in front of local theaters. In response to ADC complaints, Fox added a disclaimer to the film. It was placed, however, at the very end of the credits, following an animal rights disclaimer.

An upcoming film starring Jean-Claude Van Damme reportedly involves terrorists threatening a stadium during an ice hockey game. ADC is particularly concerned about the impact that such films may have on our community of fueling anti-Arab feelings and sparking an increase in hate crimes and discrimination.

#### 2. Stereotyping in Animated Films

In some cases, the media have been quite responsive to the concerns of the Arab American community. Walt Disney films are a case in point. In "Aladdin," the villainous characters had Arabic accents, while the good ones spoke perfect American English, implying that the 'bad guys' must be foreign and, in this case, Arab.

Furthermore, Aladdin's theme song contained lyrics that were very offensive to Arab Americans. The song referred to Aladdin's home country as a place where people "cut off your ears if they don't like your face. It's barbaric, but hey, it's home." Following intense negotiations between ADC and Disney, the lyrics were changed in the

video release of the film. In addition, the voices of the 'bad guys' were redubbed so they could not be differentiated by their Arabic accents.

The dialogue with Walt Disney has evolved into a positive relationship whereby Walt Disney has agreed to consult with ADC prior to issuing films featuring Arab characters. In accord with that agreement, the script of Aladdin's sequel "King of Thieves" was submitted to ADC for review. ADC requested that the name of one of the thieves, "Rasoul," be changed since in the Arabic language Rasoul refers to the Prophet Muhammad. Disney agreed to make the change. The experience with "Aladdin" set a precedent which helped Disney avoid potential problems with "Pocahontas" in its depiction of Native Americans, through prior consultation with Native American representatives.

Some of the same flaws which were present in "Aladdin" were also exhibited in a 1995 Miramax animated film, "Arabian Knight," in which only the evil characters had Arabic accents. ADC fears that such depictions could have a negative impact on impressionable young minds, especially Arab American children whose parents, or who themselves, may have accents.

ADC requested a meeting with Miramax to discuss the possibility of redubbing the video release of the film so that the 'bad guys' had no Arabic accents. However, Miramax has not yet responded to this request.

### **3. Defamation in the Corporate World**

Some businesses endeavor to capitalize on the stereotypes of Arabs by commercially exploiting negative images of Arabs to sell, market or distribute their products. Kraft Foods, Inc. recently ran a television commercial portraying an American tourist visiting an exotic market in Morocco, when his female companion is apparently abducted by an Arab man. The commercial perpetuated the stereotype of the Arab man as an evil and lustful abductor of Western women. Kraft agreed to pull the commercial following negotiations with ADC.

More recently, Party City, a national chain of 146 stores, sold an "Arab Sheikh" halloween mask under the product line "Monster

Masks." The mask, which stereotypically exaggerates Arab features, depicts a man with a large hooked nose, bushy eyebrows, a dark beard and mustache, and a 'kaffieh' (headgear). Products like these reinforce negative images of Arabs in the minds of young people and imply that the mere fact of being an Arab is frightening. Following complaints by ADC and concerned Arab Americans, Party City headquarters issued a directive to their local stores to discontinue the sale of the mask.

#### 4. Biased News Coverage

This year, a slanted PBS "documentary" produced by Steven Emerson sought to convey a message that Muslims are arriving at our borders with political agendas and congregating in mosques to conspire terrorist activities. The program, "Jihad in America," paralleled in some ways the demonization and vilification of the Japanese during World War II, purporting that radical Arab or Muslim groups in the United States are financing and planning terrorist activities. The documentary made sweeping and unsubstantiated claims and used a number of video excerpts and quotes out of context.

Such programs not only denigrate Muslims and Arabs, but also contribute to a climate of suspicion and distrust of Arab Americans and Arabs residing in the United States -precisely the type of climate that facilitated the unreasonable and unsubstantiated attribution of blame by the American public on the Arab and Muslim community in the immediate aftermath of the April bombing of the federal building in Oklahoma.

ADC has held productive meetings this year with news organizations such as the *Washington Times* and NBC News. ADC has also provided background materials and on-camera interviews to other networks, including CNN, on issues related to anti-Arab hate crimes. Such efforts constitute a positive step toward eradicating racism and thus decreasing the potential for hate crimes.

### III

#### DISCRIMINATION IN EDUCATION

ADC received many reports of problems that Arab Americans face in educational institutions across the nation. ADC finds, however, that such experience are the exception and not the rule. By far the majority of educators seek to be responsive and sensitive to Arab American concerns.

The following examples illustrate the types of incidents and difficulties that are reported to ADC's Education Department.

On February 28, 1995, *Newsweek* magazine sent a letter of apology to an Arab American parent who complained about a *Newsweek* map which was used in her son's classroom. The map focused on current events including "Muslim extremism" in North Africa, which reinforced negative images of Muslims. A member of the magazine's educational staff responded that *Newsweek* struggles to adequately depict "sensitive" issues and promised to be more careful and not negatively categorize Muslims.

In March 1995, in Northern Virginia, an Arab American high school student complained about being required to read Dante's *Inferno* with its description of Muhammad being punished in the circles of hell. ADC urged that the lesson be used to teach about Dante's cultural context and the long history of anti-Arab and anti-Muslim bigotry in Europe.

On March 31, 1995, the Council of Arab American Organizations ("CAAO") organized a demonstration in Brooklyn, New York, in protest of what CAAO described as a "militant racist teacher" who "beat an 8th grade Yemeni student" because of his ethnicity and religion. The boy was sent to the hospital. The teacher was accused of using racial slurs. Parents complained of other incidents of discrimination.

On April 17, 1995, an Arab American mother reported that her son was harassed by several other children at school and elsewhere in Montgomery County Maryland. She reported that her son was hit in the face with a ball, and that both she and her son were the target of hostility from the children in a public park. She reported that her son

was "terrified" and did not want to go the same school as these other boys.

In Grand Rapids, Michigan, on April 17, 1995, a mother complained that her son's high school textbook was biased against Palestinians. It distorted the facts of Palestinian history, depicting Palestinians as violent and failing to give an adequate account of the Palestinian experience in relationship to Israel.

On May 24, 1995, an Arab American parent reported that her son's teacher in Lebanon, New Jersey once commented, "Those Arabs all look alike when they put kaffieh on." The son who is "very strong and righteous" reproved the teacher.

In June, Arab Americans complained that the Board of Education in Dearborn, Michigan refused to accept a five million dollar federal grant for bi-lingual education. Dearborn, the center of the largest Arab American population in the United States, has many recent immigrants. The Arab community feels bi-lingual education is an important part of successful adaptation to life in the United States.

On August 9, 1995, ADC received a report that an Iraqi-American girl in Turlock, California had been harassed by her teacher because of her national origin. Reportedly she was verbally abused in front of the class, unjustifiably accused of cheating and ridiculed.

In September 1995, an Arab American parent complained that his son's elementary school sent a memo to parents publicizing a "Jerusalem 3000" art contest for students, which was sponsored by the Israeli Embassy and the Israeli Ministry of Education and Culture. Palestinian Americans view this as part of Israel's campaign to legitimize its illegal annexation of Palestinian East Jerusalem. It is inappropriate to use elementary schools as forums for the endorsement of such a politically charged program.

In September, a leading multi-cultural educator agreed to add an article on Arab Americans in the new edition of his book on American ethnic groups, making up for omissions in the previous editions.

In October, an Arab American student complained of an

anthropology article used as a writing model in an English composition class at a community college in Northern Virginia. The article seriously and offensively distorted Arab culture. After ADC's complaint, the article was dropped from the curriculum and the English department persuaded the publisher to replace the article with something more suitable.

On October 25, 1995, an Arab American mother whose children attend a religious school in Los Angeles, California reported that the history textbook describes Islam as a "false religion." When she complained, the principal offered to recommend to the publisher that all non-Christian religions be labeled as "false." "That's our faith," she was told.

Through its educational and outreach endeavors, ADC seeks to diffuse the prevalent anti-Arab bias that is often nurtured by the media and to present a more accurate depiction of Arab Americans, re-introducing the human element.

December 7, 1995

- \* The American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee is devoted to upholding the civil and political rights of Arab-Americans, promoting human rights and a more accurate understanding of Arab heritage and culture.

## **Endnotes**

1. *New York Times*, April 21, 1995.
2. *New York Times*, April 20, 1995.
3. *New York Post*, April 21, 1995.
4. CBS Evening News, April 19, 1995.
5. CBS, April 19, 1995.
6. Bob Grant Show, April 20, 1995.
7. *Rush To Judgement: The CAIR Report on Anti-Muslim Stereotyping, Harassment and Hate-crimes Following the Bombing of Oklahoma City's Murrah Federal Building, April 19, 1995.* (Washington, DC: Council on American Islamic Relations, 1995). CAIR documents anti-Muslim incidents and media coverage reported by Islamic organizations across the U.S.)
8. *Washington Post*, April 24, 1995.
9. See *Associated Press*, April 25, 1995. For other documentation of anti-Arab and anti-Muslim incidents, also See: *Tulsa World*, April 21, 1995; *Syracuse Herald-Journal*, April, 1995; *The Gazette* (Eastern Iowa), April 21, 1995; *New York Daily News*, April 21, 1995; *Washington Post*, April 22, 1995; *Sacramento Bee*,

- April 30, 1995; Houston Chronicle, April 24, 1995; New Yorker, May 8, 1995; Dallas Morning News, May 19, 1995.
10. On October 10, 1995, the United States Department of Justice Public Affairs Director, Carl Stern issued a statement to ADC's Legal Director confirming that Hussein Al Hussein was not and had never been a suspect in the Oklahoma bombing.
  11. In *American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee v. Reno* decided on November 8, 1995 by the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, the Court, referring to the Supreme Court's ruling in *Mathews* reaffirmed the First and Fourth Amendment rights of non-citizens, stating that because of the danger of injustice when decisions lack the procedural safeguards that form the core of constitutional due process, the *Mathews* "balancing tests" suggests that the use of undisclosed evidence in adjudications should be presumptively unconstitutional. Only the most extraordinary circumstances could support one-sided process.
  12. ADC submitted testimony to the Senate Committee on the Judiciary, Subcommittee on Terrorism, Technology and Government for the Hearings on the Omnibus Counterterrorism Act of 1995 S. 390 and the Comprehensive Terrorism Prevention Act of 1995 S. 735 on May 4, 1995. ADC also submitted testimony to the House of Representatives, Committee on the Judiciary, Subcommittee on Terrorism, Technology and Government for the June 12-13, 1995 Hearings on the Comprehensive Terrorism Act of 1995.
  13. On October 25, 1995, ADC filed a request with the United States Department of Justice asking for a DOJ investigation under Title 18 of the United States Code into the attacks on three mosques: the Mosque of the Islamic Society of Greater Springfield, Illinois; the Huntsville Islamic Center in Huntsville, Alabama, and; the Islamic Center of Passaic County in Paterson, New Jersey. Section 247(d) of Title 18 of the United States Code gives the federal government jurisdiction to intervene in state criminal investigations where such intervention would be necessary in order to ensure that justice is properly carried out.
  14. In October 1995, ADC conducted inquiries into numerous investigations of local authorities regarding hate crime incidents, including the attacks on Masjid al-Mu'mineen in Clarkston, Georgia; the Islamic Society of Greater Springfield, in Springfield, Illinois; the Islamic Center in Yuba City, California, and; the Huntsville Islamic Center in Huntsville, Alabama.
  15. *Times*, April 28, 1995.
  16. In response ADC inquiries, the Fairfax County Police did conduct a review of similar reported incidents this year in the Reston District of Virginia and found that those incidents were unrelated.
  17. ADC also represented the plaintiff throughout the mediation and dispute resolution in this case.
  18. *Arab American News*, September 23-29, 1995.
  19. ADC is currently engaged in a dialogue with the FAA in response to multiple reports of civil rights violations committed against Arab-Americans by security and airport personnel since the implementation of enhanced security measures earlier this year.



## **THE THREE BULLETS**

On November 4, 1995, three bullets penetrated Yitzhak Rabin's body. The bullets not only killed Rabin but created turmoil within Israel. The first bullet shattered the Zionist ideology to pieces. Collecting the pieces will be close to impossible. The Zionist ideology was built on two principles: First, Palestine, 'the land of Israel' belongs to one people, the Jewish people. Second, that every Jew has the 'right of return' to the Land of Israel, (state of Israel). The 'Land of Israel' is both a political and a religious conviction. The 'Land of Israel' idiom is used to create the impression that the land of Palestine only belongs to world Jewry. Every Jew that lands, by air or by sea, to the land of Palestine, after the establishment of the state of Israel, immediately granted Israeli citizenship. However an Arab born in Israel, is registered as stateless in his/her birth certificate. An Arab is allowed to request citizenship only when reaching the age of 18. In other words, Israel is an exclusivist Jewish state. This notion was to be shattered with the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin.

Since the assassination of Rabin, the Israeli government decided not to keep Jewish immigration to Israel open for every Jew. Fundamentalist Jews are to be excluded from entering the country, (of course, the Israeli government decides who is a fundamentalist). Indeed, ten American-Jews were refused entry

into Israel as immigrants in December 1995. Thus restrictions have been imposed to determine when a Jew is eligible for immigration to Israel. Israel as a Jewish state, therefore, has fallen apart. This government policy may suggest that the Jewish state concept has been exchanged for the concept of Israel as the state of the non fundamentalist Jews.

It is important to note that the idea of categorizing Jewish immigrants has found great support in the Labor Party, because they believe that Jewish fundamentalism can have dire consequences on Israeli society. Rabin was killed because he decided to (return) the (occupied) land to Palestinians. The same sentiment that killed Rabin may eventually kill Netanyahu if for example he pays no respect for the Sabbath.

Amose AOs, an influential Israeli author, said : "Since the 'Land of Israel' is only for the Jews, anyone interested in the subject can see that all Zionist institutions, especially those dealing with matters related to the Palestinian land problem, are racists." For instance, anyone who reads the charter of the the "Jewish National Fund" will become aware of the racism against Arabs. The Jewish National Fund's main role is to collect funds from world Jewry to "rescue 'Jewish land' from foreigners." The Fund's charter states that the fund is to be used to benefit, directly or indirectly, persons who belong to the Jewish Faith. Lands owned by the 'Jewish National Fund' are for Jews only. Ownership of these lands, must not transfer, by selling or any other method. Only Jewish labor is to be allowed to work in these lands.

This indicates that non-Jews cannot buy a home that has been built on 'Jewish National Fund' land. Nor can they work on the land, even if that land was originally theirs but was confiscated by Israel, as is the case with many Palestinians in Israel. According to Zionist ideology, the whole land of Israel belongs to the Jewish National Fund. In view of this, Rabin was seen as traitor who needed to be taken care of, because he was returning part of the 'Land of Israel' to non Jews.

During my last visit to Palestine, I saw many slogans stating that Jewish land is being given to non Jews. The most noticeable slogan was a poster of Rabin in Nazi's clothes. As such, most Israelis did not see Rabin as betraying Israel but betraying Judaism. In an interview with French radio on the night of Rabin's assassination Jal Kupur—the leader of Hayroot movement in France, said : "I regret the killing of Rabin, now we are unable to bring him to trial at a martial court."

The second bullet brought to surface the conflict that the Israeli authorities were always avoiding, that is, the conflict between religion and the state. Zionist philosophy was based on the Jewish religion. The first Zionist convention, held in 1897 in Basel, Switzerland, was called "The return to our ancestors land." It was emphasized repeatedly by the Israeli government that Israel is a Jewish state in a religious way, since this is the only strong bond it has with the Jewish community worldwide. It is well known, however, that the founders of the Israeli state were secular socialists, and that most of the Jews in Israel conduct secularism in their normal daily life. It is worth noting Golda Meirs' statement on American Television: "I am a secular Jew."

The Israeli ideology went as far as mixing religion and nationality in one pot. The nationality of the Jew in Israel became Jewish and his religion was Jewish as well. As a result, secular Israelis continue to search for the relationship between their Judaism and nationalism, causing confusion and even an identity crisis in their minds about the definition of the Jewish nation. If an Israeli Jew gives up the religious magnitude of this nation, he/she will be left out in the cold, and will face these questions: 'What right do I have over this land?' 'What is my relationship with the Jews of the world who support us financially, and provide us with political immunity?'

This is why the Jewish communities are influential in guiding Israeli policy. Similarly, the Jewish religious leaders have great influence on Israeli policy. This unusual relationship

was destined to blow up, especially when the Israelis attempted to break from this relationship and become loyal to Israel.

This idea has been revived since the Rabin assassination even at the highest levels. Many Israeli Jews realized that religious Jews along with the Jews abroad impose their unwelcome beliefs upon them. The American Jews for example, used their influence with members of the American congress to put obstacles in the way of the Israeli government's political march towards peace, put pressure at the White House to prevent withdrawal from the Golan Heights in Syria, and to move the U.S. Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem in an attempt to sabotage the peace process. Most importantly, a group of Jewish religious leaders began issuing religious leaflets condemning the 'giving up of any part of Israel to foreigners.' These leaflets asked Israeli soldiers to refuse military orders to leave Palestinian cities and to stand in the way of preventing the establishment of new Jewish settlements. This events were described by many Israeli intellectuals as an attempt to "terrify Jewish opinion."

After the death of Rabin the Jewish clergies faced great criticism from the media, inside and outside Israel. Many Israelis said that the mask has finally fallen of the faces of these religious leaders. It became clear that Rabin's killer, Yegal Amer, had received religious and spiritual support from some clergy members. Their were several funds created throughout the world to raise money to defend Rabin's killer. From Canada to New York Jews were collecting donations for the killer's defense fund. Yegal Amer said that "Rabin should die because he gave up part of Israel's land, and that is against Judaism." Shortly after Rabin's burial, his grave was destroyed. The situation deteriorated further when Shimon Peres' life was threatened. Clashes escalated, and some of the religious men were arrested subject to investigations. Supporter of Amer were also arrested. The so called Israeli democracy was in crisis.

Serious clashes occurred between fanatic Jews and the Israeli government. Actually, the clashes began before the the Rabin's assassination when the government mustered enough votes in the Knesset in favor of the Oslo accords, but only with the support of five Arab votes. The rightist and fanatic Jews claimed that these votes did not represent the Jewish people, and that the government has no right to execute that treaty because it does not come from the Jewish majority.

At this point, the notion of Israelism reemerged and some Israeli leaders said that every native in Israel is an Israeli, regardless of his religion or nationality. This disposition came as another nail in the coffin of the Zionist ideology. This meant that the state of Israel belongs to its inhabitants not to Jews alone, ( it's important to note that within Israel proper over 18-20% of the population are Palestinian Arabs). As such, the Zionist notion of Israel as a Jewish State as envisioned by the Zionists is no longer feasible. As a response to this eventual predicament, the Likud Party issued a statement which said that Rabin betrayed Zionism.

The third bullet which killed Rabin, led many Israeli scholars and intellectuals to look into reevaluate the Israeli education system and recommend major changes. In early childhood, Israelis (commonly Jews) were taught that the land of Israel belongs only to Jews. Hatred toward non Jews, particularly for Arabs in Hebrew Literature for children, has a great influence on Jewish children and teaches them how to hate. I illustrated this point in my study, "The Arab Character in Hebrew Literature for Children" published in London.) The minority mentality that accompanied Jews inside and outside Israel, even after the establishment of Israel continues to dominate Israeli thinking. As a result, Jews were convinced that a Jew would not kill another Jew for a political reason, no matter what. The *Maariv* newspaper reported that shortly before Rabin's assassination he said: "I do not believe that a Jew could kill another Jew." Rabin repeated this statement to the French

newspaper "*Politic International*." How mistaken Rabin was!

Israel Shahak, a retired Hebrew University professor, predicted in January 1994 interview, that fundamentalist Jews may use violence against Jews, and Rabin is not to die naturally. They also warned that the government protection and grant of free hand to the fundamentalists in the occupied territories will cause disaster in the future, if the government decides to withdraw from the occupied territories according to the peace agreement. Confrontation (among Jews themselves) therefore was imminent. Yet Israeli arrogance ridiculed these assessments and the suggested changes to the educational curriculum were gone with wind.

The internal disputes within Israel are not political, but are ethnic and fanatic. Jewish fundamentalism, however, has not attracted the international media in the same way that 'Islamic fundamentalism' has. Israel today is on a crossroads: either to continue with the present Zionist ideology, or renounce it. Whichever road is chosen will result clashes and cause a gap between Israeli Jews and Jews abroad. Interestingly, Israelis feel culturally and linguistically different from other Jews. Like Christianity and Islam, Judaism is composed of many ethnicities. That is, one religion with many nationalities, and this logic hits at the heart of Zionist principles.

The cultural fragmentation of Israeli society has gone abroad to world Jewry. For instance, Netanyahu was prohibited from attending the memorial ceremony for Rabin in New York. This aggravated many American Jewish organizations which refused to participate in the ceremony. An Israeli correspondent described the event as a failure because only 10,000 of the expected 500,000 people showed up to mourn Rabin and support Shimon Peres. This is a new phenomenon, both Israel and Zionism were not accustomed to. How will Israel overcome this division? One can not predict what may happen, the days are yet to come.

*Fouzi El-Asmar*

**PALESTINE**  
**Post Cards from the Collection of**  
**Ezzedine Kalak**

A book  
of separation and yearning.  
Ezzedine collected old pictures postcards of Palestine  
not simply as a historical record or an attempt to  
deceive the years. They were pictures of the Palestine he  
loved that he could see and touch every day.  
This book tells the story of Ezzedine love.  
Palestine the land: Ezzedine would open his old picture  
album as he would open the shutters on a window.  
Palestine streamed in with the sunlight.  
Palestine the people: From time to time, Ezzedine would  
steal an hour or two from his years to shuffle his cards  
and hear again the sound of picks on the land, and  
the cries of street-vendors and the songs of shepherds.  
If, as you turn the pages of this book, you are  
moved by its pictures and its colours,  
remember that these are the deeds of the  
homeland and they are soaked in  
the blood of its latest witness.

*from the introduction of*  
**Farouk Mardam-Bey**

**ST. JAFFA (du côté de la Mer)**



*Jaffa, View of Jaffa from beside the sea. Published by Messageries Maritme (before 1948)  
From: Palestine, Post Cards from the collection of Ezzedine Kalak by Farouk Mardam -Bey & Elias Sanbar*





Safad mit Dschermak. With the Dschermak. View to Dschermak.

Safad, With the Dschermak. Published by Verlag von Frieder & Chr. (before 1948)  
From: *Palestine, Post Cards from the collection of Ezzedine Kalak* by Farouk Mardam-Bey & Elias Sanbar



Jaffa, View of Jaffa from beside the gardens, Published by Messageries Maritme (before 1948)  
From: *Palestine, Post Cards from the collection of Ezzedine Kalak* by Farouk Mardam -Bey & Elias Sanbar



61. - Ramleh ou Asimathia, sur la route de Jérusalem à Jaffa

Gustave Remy, éditeur, 4 Pontarlier (France)

Ramleh, *On the road from Jerusalem to Jaffas*. Published by Gustave Remy (before 1948)  
From: *Palestine, Post Cards from the collection of Ezzedine Kalak* by Farouk Mardam -Bey & Elias Sanbar



Gaza, *Farmers from the environs of Gaza*. Published by Dimitri Tarazi (before 1948)  
From: *Palestine, Post Cards from the collection of Ezzedine Kalak* by Farouk Mardam -Bey & Elias Sanbar



rauen aus Bethlehem. Femmes de Bethléem. Bethlehem women.

Bethlehem, Bethlehem women. Published by unknown (before 1948)

From: *Palestine, Post Cards from the collection of Ezzedine Kalak* by Farouk Mardam -Bey & Elias Sanbar



Bethlehem, *Bethlehem*. Published by Halabjian (before 1948)

From: *Palestine, Post Cards from the collection of Ezzedine Kalak* by Farouk Mardam -Bey & Elias Sanbar



Tiberias, *From the lake*. Published by M. Meguerditchian (before 1948)

From: *Palestine, Post Cards from the collection of Ezzedine Kalak* by Farouk Mardam -Bey & Elias Sanbar



Hebron, *View from the quarantine zone*. Published by Dimitri Tarazi (before 1948)  
From: *Palestine, Post Cards from the collection of Ezzedine Kalak* by Farouk Mardam -Bey & Elias Sanbar





Nablus, Nablus with the mountain of Ebal. Published by Christian Imberger & Co. (before 1948)  
From: *Palestine*, Post cards from the collection of Ezzedine Kalak by Farouk Mardam-Bey & Elias Sanbar

*"The land surrounding Nablus is striking for its lush cultivation.  
The town is encircled by well-tilled fields and groves of thriving pomegranate,  
almond, jujube and fig trees, mulberries with trunks that grow  
to 3 meters in circumference, hardy walnuts, apricot and lemon trees etc.  
The air is embalmed with the scent of orange, rose and jasmine."*

*—Guide Joanne, 1887*

**ONE DAY  
IN THE LIFE OF NABLUS**  
and other poems

**ONE DAY IN THE LIFE OF NABLUS**

*We fall, not on our knees, but on our hearts*  
Vassar Miller

**1**

Summer. The figs are bruise pink,  
tomatoes luscious enough  
to stop a hurried man.  
Ignore the flies.  
At 9 a.m. peasants savor *shish-kebab*  
in puny, vaulted eateries.  
Ah, the roasting coffee's aroma,  
*the folk-lore of each of the senses.*

This is a place for commerce.  
Everything here is for sale:  
children's toys, kitchen utensils,  
bananas, peanuts, pinenuts, posters,  
cassettes, straw mats, sponge mats, watches,  
Elvis' T-shirts, turkey breasts, shoes.

The vendor in dishevelled clothes  
arranges a feast of pears,  
lifts one with pride  
as he might his own child.  
He bellows into the air:  
*Go to sleep with a sweet mouth.*  
He sees the soldiers.  
He does not brood over power or history.

2

No curfew  
during our five-week stay.

3

Walking on University Boulevard,  
I spot soldiers manning a checkpoint:  
the school has been ordered shut.  
And, as if in the recurring dream,  
I frisk myself for my passport  
but find my pockets empty.  
I go past the black machine guns  
thinking how as a boy  
I caught black wasps  
and removed their stingers.

A few yards away from the checkpoint  
I read a sign:  
Office of Reconciliation.  
Inside, a Samaritan rabbi  
clad in brown caftan and red turban  
is ensconced on a couch, waiting,  
resigned to waiting.

4

On an immaculate wall  
of a friend's living room  
hangs a picture in a gilded frame:  
a woman squatting amidst the rubble  
of her house demolished by the army,  
cheek cupped in hand,  
peering into a white, empty bucket.

5

In cafes men congregate in the afternoons,  
slowly sip their tea  
(as if time were their own),  
shuffle cards, spur the backgammon dice  
(as if chance were their own).  
They listen to songs  
of unrequited love, promises unkept, partings.  
When the sun sinks behind the hills  
they salute the fading day, irreconciled,  
leaving the folded market  
to the screech of armored cars.

6

The sky flowers tonight.  
The stars are bright and real  
as children's eyes  
as the faces of women loved  
after years of waiting.  
A meteor dives like a deft acrobat.  
A satellite sails west to east, unperturbed.  
Is it Russian or American?  
A scientist or a spy?

Or a station where voices  
of distant lovers dovetail?

In gowns of soft lights  
the town performs the ritual of sleep.  
Will the vendor,  
will the woman who lost her house  
sleep with a sweet mouth?  
The settlement, fortress on the mountain peak,  
and the jail on the hilltop  
flood their dreams with yellow lights.

I want the kind breeze  
the power of pears  
the sound of the flute,  
melodious and sad  
like the hills of this land,  
to grant us all,  
vendors and soldiers,  
grant us ample love  
that we may turn this troubled page  
that we may sleep with a sweet mouth.

(Nablus, West Bank, 1986)

## CONCEIVED OUT OF YEARNING

*To build is to collaborate with time,  
Marguerite Yourcenar,  
Memoirs of Hadrian*

I could tell you the number  
or describe the pattern of the wallpaper  
and the desk between the two beds—  
but this is a hotel room.  
It is not meant to be observed.  
Its beige air cannot retain  
kisses, coughs or pain.  
Tomorrow it'll be bulldozed  
and no one will inherit it.  
It could be in Chicago or Taipei.  
The universal imagination has set in—  
the imagination of economic man  
whose numbers are his romance,  
who sees sin in color  
and virtue in line,  
who lets in no demons  
other than his own.

I am a yearner  
conceived out of yearning.  
I want to feel  
the walls warm from being touched  
by long-vanished hands.  
I want to feel the city lights  
shine as if from the firmament.  
I want to kneel and sing  
some refined praise.  
But even the moon tonight leans  
like a derelict

against the brick-walled sky.  
My beige spirit begs to be wounded  
by a Spanish woman's lullaby.

### **POEM**

America makes everything easy—except life.

### **YAKAMATETTA**

Yakamatetta was a hamster.  
My little son gave him his name.  
Yakamatetta was brown and white,  
lean and quiet.  
He built a round nest  
of bark and papertowel,  
and slept in his cage all day.  
At night, he rolled on his wheel,  
rolled wherever the wheel would lead.  
My son stroked him and fed him greens.  
My son's face lit, without a shade of doubt,  
and they spoke in a language  
only a child and a hamster could understand.

One morning we found Yakamatetta dead.  
He was young, six months old.  
We buried him in a hole in the garden.  
My son asked when Yakamatetta would come back.  
We said he won't come back.

My son asked why.  
We said because the dead don't come back.  
My son asked where Yakamatetta would go.  
We said we'd plant flowers on his grave,  
and he'd turn into a flower.  
My son looked at the empty cage,  
ducked his head, and said:  
"Yakamatetta died in his cage, at home."

### **ONE PILLOW**

I rest my tired head on two pillows,  
begging the day's creatures to let me sleep.  
It is midnight, and must be dawn where you are.  
The pulse travels faster than the light.  
Which side are you sleeping on?  
I feel my right arm sheltering your face,  
you smile a knowing smile,  
one I would pocket if I went to war.  
We are as happy as when we met.  
I don't know whether we are young or old,  
but you are my wife  
and tonight my romantic love.  
My head nestles next to yours—  
on one pillow.





But fear, twisting in my guts, rejoins:  
What use is the seat belt  
when the plane itself is propped up by a cloud?  
And why did my father, who never came with me  
to the airport, today wave gingerly,  
with visible concern,  
behind the tall, glass gate?  
And the crow, why did the crow caw  
three times above my head in the morning  
as I bent to ride in the car?

*Pray, I want to urge my seatmate,  
though our mount is not a camel nor a horse.  
Add the pilot's faith to your own.  
Pray. Four beads at a time.*  
But it all happens in a flash—  
the tunnel dims, and the desperate howls  
are swiftly stilled  
by a great blast,  
by a fireball in the sky,  
and my body and sixty others lie charred,  
and the crow-colored cameras come to feast.

## THE PIGEONS

No one deigns to keep us as pets  
or waste his binoculars and ahs!  
watching our dreary flight.  
No one trusts us to carry letters.  
Who would place our sculptures  
at the portals of heros' cemeteries?  
Not all birds are created equal,  
we know that. We're the riff-raff  
brothers of Hiawatha, *rats with wings*.  
Our cooing is a dismal croak  
next to the nightingale's melody,  
even next to the parrot's jestful syllables.  
And, please, never include us  
in the same guide with the peacocks.

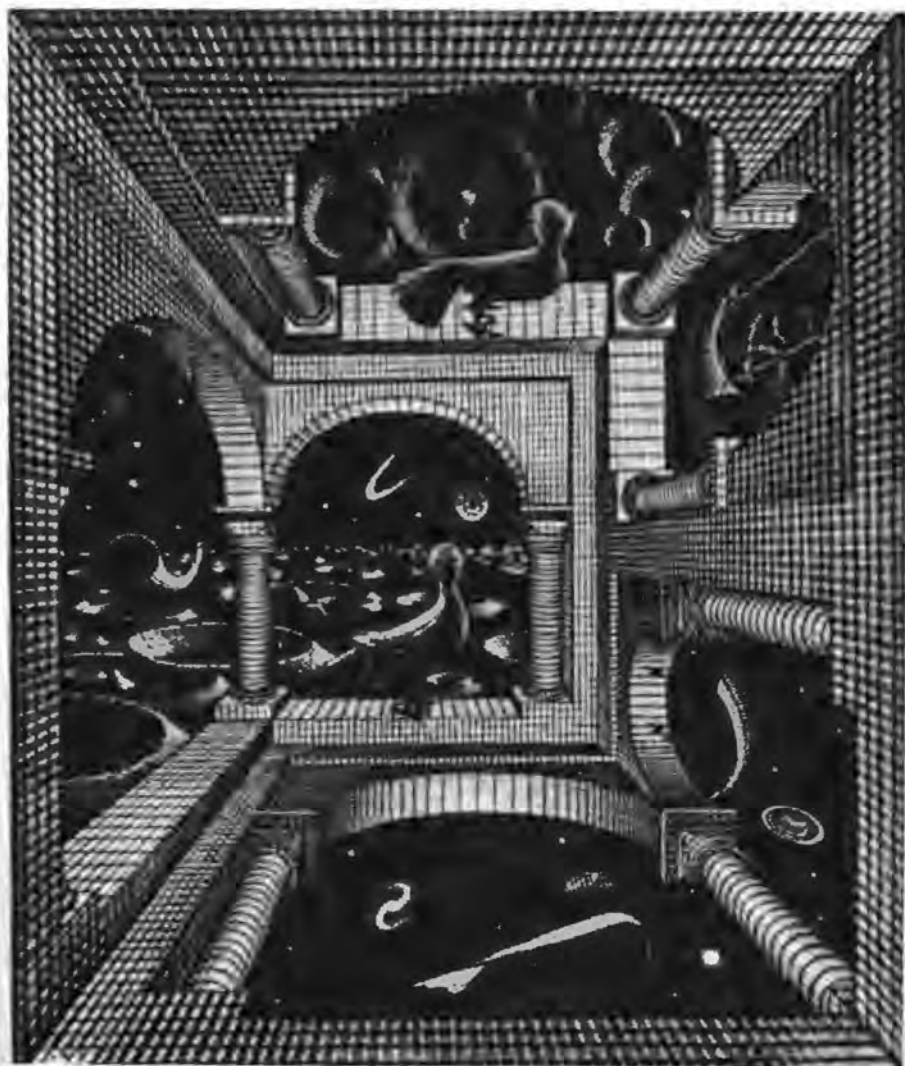
Yet why be sad  
and let resentment eat the heart,  
pluck the feathers?  
Why throw ourselves under  
the wheels of speeding cars?  
Better unsung pigeons than dinosaurs.  
Better the sprawling city than the retreating forest.  
In the city we peck ample seeds and  
popcorn strewn by strange human hands.  
We lack no straw or trees for nesting.  
The parks and squares are our kingdom—  
to pick on fellow sparrows,  
hone our character,  
cock our heads back and forth  
like haughty Frenchmen.

At times, as the sky thunders  
and the wind beats in random directions,

as the storm is about to menace the city,  
we feel agitated, rush then swirl  
above the heads of the hurried crowd,  
as if implicated. We arrange ourselves  
in patterns, perform an atavistic dance,  
then we land, in unison, on a grey, slanted roof.  
Our eyes scan the darkening horizon,  
desperate to find our lost calling.

*Sharif Elmusa*

\* Sharif S. Elmusa. Coeditor with Gerg Orfalea of *Grape Leaves; A Century of Arab American Poetry* (Utah University Press). His poetry appeared in several anthologies and numerous literary journals.



M. C. Escher, *Another world* (wood-engraving), 1947

## EMPIRE OF SURROUNDING WALLS

Translated by Clarissa C. Burt\*\*

DECEMBER 31

Thus

Egyptians roam about, as roam hippopotami  
next to their graves  
forgetting lands beyond the river,  
drawing close together  
and closer.

Not they, horses taking off into the heart  
of the desert;

not they, fishes opening a sluicgate to the sea  
and sluicgates to forgetfulness.

So why, away from home, do you carry a saddlebag  
of ruined encampments?

You vagabond in the world alone  
searching for a street resembling Shubra  
and a cafe resembling the Bustan

You enter a bar you call the Warehouse  
conversing with bodies of terra cotta  
and faces resembling tombs  
topped with wax,  
color-coated.

There you are, speaking to them in prose,

losing your primary characteristics.  
The brown leg asks you,  
so you extend your eye afar  
and point to Opera Bar  
and stretch out your legs and touch the base  
of the statue.  
You drink two glasses with broad bean sprouts  
crunching the sparrow carcass with dogteeth.  
You hear chirping  
and think how the world's sparrows  
had landed in Opera's bars;  
knowing this abundant etiquette they came  
obediently between your canine teeth  
Did the hoopoe bird lead them astray, that former  
General in the Army of Solomon?  
Or were they sauteed in oil by a civilian president?  
You have to have your tenth glass  
or leave the bar counter  
and enter the circle of the endangered....

PORTRAIT OF GEORGES HENEIN

Because you write like a pirate  
running behind his letters  
from storm  
to storm  
ascending page/surf/ace  
with skulls  
crowded with alien slaves  
and empty waterskins...  
Because you scream whenever land comes too near  
the ship,  
you gasp whenever shots toy with your hair  
as they are conveyed from head to head  
as music is conveyed.  
You are trusting, then, of life  
and a hater of it,  
knowing what is after death  
knowing, whenever you scream, that it's your end  
when you leave your last lover  
and embrace the heaving water  
    while in your eyes  
are piles of islands which you will not see  
and battles into which you did not plunge  
and bullets which will not hit you  
and the face of the homeland  
which you loved,  
the only home.



## WALL OF GENESIS

One morning  
a peasant awoke  
and looked around.  
He saw no smoke hovering 'round rooftops  
no Nile sloshing on girls' heads  
He heard no woman singing to her child 'rousing  
from death  
nor men coughing, the scent of wives  
emanating from their chests,  
He saw no tram with a trailend of children  
nor a chortling demon, returning to the graves.  
So  
he decided that it be Shubra  
precisely as he saw it in his dreams  
And there was Shubra.

Another morning  
a king awoke  
and looked around  
He saw no drapes veiling his bed  
nor a flag fluttering near his window  
nor did he find a soft thigh between his legs  
nor a carpet covering the grasses of the privy,  
He heard no mumbling of guards  
nor the clanking of their weapons.  
So  
he decided to be king over Shubra  
precisely as he was in his dreams  
And there was the Kingdom of Shubra;  
its flag was made of infants' diapers  
and women's scarves.

Another morning

a general awoke  
and looked around  
He saw no trench around his bed  
nor khaki cloth on his body  
nor a dagger under his pillow  
He saw no borders to defend  
nor enemies to war  
nor a map to point to with his stick.  
So  
he decided to be a general for Shubra  
precisely as he was in his dreams  
And there was the generalate of Shubra,  
and there were its borders which extend  
from the statue of Ramses  
to the south  
to the tram stop to the north.

One final morning  
a dictator awoke  
and looked around  
He found no revolution weighing  
down students' bookbags  
nor a patriotic war to decrease coffeehouse scouts  
He saw no traitors to condemn to death  
nor a plot for the Media Machine to foil  
He heard no slogans mobilizing the masses  
nor songs bespeaking his masculinity  
So  
He decided to be a charismatic Leader for Shubra  
precisely as he saw in his dreams  
And Shubra was  
the first capital in history  
for the Third World.

ANWAR KAMEL DIES A DIVINE DEATH

Always

I would see you thrown down in the Road  
bullets crowding together around you  
like swarms of flies

With your grey coat wide open  
and at your side that dark bird  
naked of feathers  
which moments ago was your leather attache case  
before its papers were plucked out.

But you died a regular death  
resembling your last escape  
resembling that hateful death  
    the Cairene death  
    the Hijazi death  
    the Najdi death the  
        Damascene death

of hunger  
and dyspepsia  
    laughter  
    and despondency,  
that packaged death  
whose shelf-life has ended  
and which no longer brings on anything but vomiting  
    and headache.

That death which is vanquished by  
aspirin pills  
and drops of valium.

You must feel envy of our surrealistic death  
coming from the desert  
riding its camouflaged she-camel,  
in whose saddlebag are its electronic missiles  
and the distance between whose head and fingers  
is a bowl of porridge

leftover from  
yesterday's supper.

#### ANWAR KAMEL'S DEATHTIME STORY

On that autumny evening  
before death took you  
I was bending near you  
like an old grandmother  
as I passed my fingers, crammed with old rings  
    painted with henna  
between your head and ears;  
I was telling you that never-ending story  
as you listened with baited breath  
after the death gurgle had gone away  
and I had chased away that stubborn angel  
like a hungry cat.  
On that trip  
I will take Shubra with me  
wherever I go  
I won't be embarrassed by her black head-covering  
nor by her swollen feet  
I will carry for her her bundle chock full  
    of kids  
    and black-clothed women  
Whenever I see two lovers, I'll hurl at them  
    a scream from her little ones  
Whenever I espy a smile  
    I'll extinguish it with a moan from  
        the black-clothed women.  
Like an old respectable terrorist  
and without my fingers trembling  
I will sow what remains of despair and ruin  
in the gardens

and plazas  
and laughing streets.  
When they catch sight of me  
I'll smile at them like a good monk  
as I disguise my banner  
    from which emanates  
the scent of death and infants.  
At the decisive moment  
I will raise it aloft yelling the warcry  
and I'll run from city to city  
with that army, which I hid in my chest  
    for so long, behind me.  
No living tree  
no cats licking their paws  
no dogs wagging their tails  
no humans listening to music  
no monks preaching ruin –  
there must be complete quiet,  
after the obliteration of all,  
and deep sleep  
    on the swinging things tied to their necks  
braided from the guts of those children  
who didn't know the battle of the streets  
    nor death in the passageways  
    nor recumbency among milling legs.  
On the following sunset  
we will shake our bodies to a monotonous rhythm  
as we smoke Cleopatra  
atop our soft seats  
    having the bronze color  
    bisected by a triangle of  
    pale rosepink  
which previously were the behinds  
    of those women,  
whose cheeks have never propped on cupped hands

after the little ones  
have gone to sleep  
with arms and legs intertwined  
like an insolvable puzzle.

Ahmed Taha

- \* **Ahmed Taha** is a well known Egyptian poet, whose second volume of poetry, *Taawila thamaaniya wa'arba'iin* (Table 48) won a national prize for poetry in 1992. A member of 'ASwaat' poetry collective among the Seventies' Poets in Egypt, he has been an active writer, editor and critic, publishing in numerous journals, and bringing out the avant garde magazines *al-Kitaba al-Sawda'* and *al-Jaraad*. His books of poetry include *Laa tufaariq ismii*, " (Don't Leave my Name) and the most recent *Imbatooriyat al-Hawaa'iT* (Empire of Surrounding Walls).
- \*\* **Clarissa C. Burt** is a poet and Visiting Assistant Professor of Arabic at Ohio University in Athens, Ohio. She received her Ph.D from University of Chicago in 1993, in Comparative Semitics, with Arabic as her main language and literature. Her work research focusses on poetry, ancient and modern. Among her books are *Zygotes and Embryonix* and *Coming to Term*.



## THAWRA DES ODALISQUES AT THE MATISSE RÉTROSPECTIVE

*Yaum min al ayyam* we just decided enough  
a unique opportunity the retrospective brought us all together  
I looked across at Red Culottes and gave the signal  
She passed it on to Woman in Veil we kicked through canvas  
most of us have very good legs lower body strength, you know  
although the Persian Model needed help it wasn't her  
it was the way she was drawn

*Mais* it wasn't just one day we up and decided, Culottes  
*Gris*, I have to disagree *je voudrais dire*  
*c'etais les deux Mauresques* in veils

We don't know they were Moroccan, With Magnolias

Non, *mais* it was like seeing *nous-memes*  
The first moving Muslim women we had seen well I anyway  
*n'ai jamais voir* any that I could *reconnaitre*  
It was like seeing ourselves walk by in veils  
then walk out of the museum

"She must be so uncomfortable in that position"  
the two agreed in front of Two Odalises  
Suddenly I felt my back aching



a seventy-five year kind of ache  
and I scattered the chessboard

We woke up Harmony in Yellow  
(all she'd eaten in years was lemons)  
Asia and *Zulma* older led the procession  
"Everyone whose arms are numb  
    from sleeping on them raise your hand"  
Blue Nude decided she was with us  
    because of her eyes and her position  
Pink Nude wanted in  
even though she wasn't an *odalisque* because  
"that bastard, my ass is cold from these blue tiles  
and I can't love a man who made my head smaller than my tits  
almost an afterthought"  
Being very Modern she knew all  
the dirty words in several languages  
    she was great to have along  
Woman with Goldfish came she'd had a tough life *maskini*  
and brought the goldfish  
We shook the others by the ostrich feather hats  
but they still believed the hype were getting lots of praise  
as Matisse's girls people came from miles  
    around that type of thing

*Awwal shee* we all wanted to pee  
Then Hindu Pose and With Tambourine  
    led us in some stretches  
I helped With Turkish Chair rebraid her hair  
Most of the Culottes and with Magnolias wanted clothes  
Their nipples were icy and they were coughing the draft  
had gone straight to their chests

The next thing everybody wanted to do was leave  
The guards were understandably upset but we noticed

many of us were bigger than them *ma starju*  
Zulma reached up for us being tallest  
and tore down the museum banners for  
the ones who wanted clothes  
Somebody must have called the Board Members  
because outside the entrance men with distinguished looks  
and women with perfect make-up

and large expensive tasteful brooches tried to reason with us  
Somehow the news leaked quickly to the press

Pink Nude got the most movie offers  
Playboy tried to talk the pants off the Culottes  
Vantage offered a lucrative advance to With Magnolias  
for a book deal  
with promis on Good Morning America and Geraldo  
wanted to know  
"Did Matisse ever get aroused in front of you?"--typical:

Matisse this, Matisse that no one wanted to know about us

Statements were issued on our behalf  
at first by Arab nationalists, by women's groups  
Mostly the feminists abandoned us  
after some of us decided to wear *hijab*  
Then someone spread conspiracy rumors about us  
among the Arabs  
Like, why had we hung around so long? In the capitals  
of the Western world so long? With our legs so open?  
You can see *les implications dangereuses*

We were shocked so many changes the Arab world  
the pettiness the countries  
most of us had never heard of before  
the Ottomans had fallen in 1924 Israel in the middle

like a stiletto  
The Lane Robe immediately  
got involved in Algerian politics The Persian Model  
went on Hajj got arrested in a demonstration  
    oh those Iranians  
Red Culottes it turned out had cancer exposure  
    of the breasts to Paris  
and New York air *zalamuha wallah* that's when  
I Small Odalisque in a Purple Robe decided  
to study law  
all of it in English French German Spanish Arabic Russian  
one by one  
we sued the pants off the Matisse  
estate and the museums: cruel  
and unusual contortions unhealthy and unfair  
working conditions at nonexistent wages  
only lemons and oranges to eat  
    causing citric overdosage and extreme puckering  
all to indulge somebody's sense of color Pink Nude  
was there to say "Shove your color  
palette, Mister, right up your--" in the seventeen  
    European languages  
she'd overheard from sixty years' of patrons  
which the jury was instructed to disregard

Suddenly Asia got a call from Bayadere Culottes  
    wanting to end it  
crying we don't fit in anywhere anymore  
    it's too late too late  
with Matisse we are nothing without Matisse nothing  
you can take the *odalisque* out of the *oda*  
but can you take the *oda* out of the *odalisque*  
    can you can you  
Asia said we had to get back together *b 'sur`a b 'sur`a*  
Maybe form a support group, as in

Hi I'm Odalisque with Big Breasts,  
and I was painted by Matisse, but I'm in control now

That's when we found out With Magnolias  
    had been painted pregnant  
so we all got together for her delivery  
She sat in an Ottoman-era birthing chair  
    we took out of a photograph  
(I got to wondering, how many other things  
    could we pull from pictures?)  
We held her hands Bayadere wiped her brow  
We were all wondering *yallah yallah* but afraid  
would the baby be smothered by the same aesthetic forms  
would it be killed by paint fumes from another era  
before it had a chance to breathe its options  
She screamed She pushed She crowned She gushed And then!  
It was like nothing any of us had ever seen!  
It was a girl! She waved her fists! She let go  
with a high-pitched protest to the world!  
Only a smudge  
Only a tiny smudge lime-green on her left temple  
I Small Odalisque drew up my purple robe and ululated  
and so  
we ululated  
in post-odalisques jube-  
    jube-  
    jube-  
    jube-  
    jubilation

If all the *odalisques*

in all the paintings  
in all the museums

in all the capitals of Europe  
got up and left,  
they'd leave a big hole in the wall  
and people who'd come to stare through it  
'd get sucked into Asia and Africa  
until the whole peninsula of Europe  
'd disappear between those two great  
thighs of the world

Then what would we do for culture?

*Mohja Kahf*

\* **Dr. Mohja Kahf** is professor in the Department of English and the Middle East Studies Program at the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville. She has published poetry in *Exquisite Corpse* and *Visions International*.

## SELECTED POEMS

*Translated by Husain Haddawy*

### THE REMEMBRANCE

They said  
"If Abd al-Haq would only leave us,  
Something from a history he wrote,  
The first page,  
Or something from the end,  
Something for remembrance."

He said,  
"The first page I wrote was  
A prologue summing up my life,  
The last, an index to my life.  
In either case, I will be giving  
The key to my heart.  
For there is no remembrance,  
Save that of death,  
Without a prologue or an index."

### EQUATION

He wiped off the brush,  
Leaving no color to bear

The burden of the earth,  
And left the silent painting  
To lament its everlasting sorrow.

Tell me,  
Who suffers more now,  
An artist without colors,  
Or sorrow shut off  
In the silence of the canvas?

**FROM "THE MEDITATIONS  
OF ABD AL-HAQ AL-BAGHDADI"**

My dream takes me with it,  
And we walk together.  
When I stumble, it smiles,  
And when it stumbles, I cry.

I walked on a sidewalk, wet with rain,  
And slipped and said,  
"How hard it is to slip!"  
The sidewalk said,  
"How hard to keep balance!"

Even when the sun is vertical  
In the sky,  
I see a shadow following me.

\* \* \*

I opened a window  
On my silence,  
But my throat became sore,  
Before I opened my mouth.

\* \* \*

When I sleep,  
Two desires awaken:  
The desire to speak  
And the desire to rejoice.

\* \* \*

In the middle of the journey  
Arises an anxiety  
To look behind.

\* \* \*

In the garden of memory  
There are always walls.  
Expanding or contracting,  
Always walls.

The farther I fare,  
The further I go back to my beginning.

\* \* \*

A life without secrets  
Negates the pleasure of discovery.

My ink is black,  
Why do you then ask me  
To paint a rainbow?

### **WORDS**

Who will give me a language,  
Not found in dictionaries,



To take me beyond consciousness,  
Beyond the orbit of things,  
A language no one understands,  
So that I may describe  
What is happening in Mesopotamia,  
In Arbil or Samarra?

I am not asking for the language  
Of the Qur'an, the Gospel, or the Old Testament,  
I am asking for a language without meaning,  
Without logic or any sense,  
So that I may describe  
What is happening in my country.

Is there anyone among you,  
Who can assist this poet with such words?

1991

### **MY LAND**

My land is beyond the lines  
Of longitude or latitude,  
Not found on my map.  
I do not plan to build  
A nest for the sparrow  
Nor a field for the deer;  
All I plan to plant is oleander.  
For I am intimate with isolated things  
Cast on the edge of memory,  
Or the shores of forgetfulness.

1991

### **THE PERIOD**

The lands of dreams intertwined,

And in my mind the branches grew,  
Each one stretching in my bosom  
To embrace the impossible.  
Love is water,  
And the letters are baskets in my hand,  
And the sorrows are oranges.

If I could only penetrate  
To the depth of the fountain,  
If this branch, which is broken in my breast,  
Could only help me  
To fill the baskets  
Before the candles grow pale in my hand.

O yearning of the root,  
O longing of the limbs,  
Sorrows are oranges,  
And there is a craving in my breast.

*Muhammad Said Saggar*

- \* **Mohammed Said Saggar** who has published numerous works of poetry and novels is a renowned authority on the subject of Arabic calligraphy. He has received several awards for his book cover designs and his architectural work on the Macca Gates.



Child burned to death in the American bombing  
of Al-Amiriya shelter. *Commission of Inquiry.*  
From *The Fire This Time* by Ramsey Clark

## **PHANTASMAGORIA and other poems**

### **AN ADJACENT NIGHTMARE**

I TOOK A BRUSH  
WET WITH DEATH  
AND ON THE WAR'S WALL  
I DREW A WINDOW  
I OPENED IT  
LOOKING FOR A DOVE  
OR A DREAM  
BUT I SAW ANOTHER WAR  
AND A MOTHER  
MOURNING A MARTYR WHO WAS  
STILL IN HER WOMB

### **PHANTASMAGORIA**

BLUE RAIN  
ADDRESSING A SILENT ORCHESTRA  
IN A DISTANT MORNING  
THE MAESTRO  
CANNOT READ THE FOGGY NOTES  
BUTTERFLIES  
BLOOM FROM YOUR VOCAL CHORDS

AND COLONIZE  
MY MEMORY

**EXILE**

IN A THICKET OF OTHERS  
I RUN TO MY ECLIPSE  
QUESTION MARKS WOUND ME  
" WHERE IS SHE " ?  
THE HORIZON IS ARMED WITH BARBED WIRES  
AND I HARVEST DEFINITIONS  
OF THE WORD  
COUNTRY

**POSITIONS**

I AM A DOOR  
SEALED WITH AGONY  
AND YOU...  
YOU ARE A WINDOW  
WATCHING THE WORLD  
WITHOUT BLINKING ITS CURTAINS  
WE BOTH EMBRACE THE WALL'S BURDEN  
BUT  
IF WE COME CLOSER  
THE HOUSE COLLAPSES  
AND WE PRONOUNCE EACH OTHER  
DEBRIS

**MY FRIEND AT K & 17TH**

from the windows of newspapers  
Gorbachev appears to be  
resisting an inescapable autumn  
a very homeless man

leans on a wall  
the clouds are about  
to refute meteorologists  
Washingtonians hurry to havens  
today he feels special  
he has a black umbrella  
although he loves rain  
he squats under it  
to watch others  
who are homeful  
become helpless for a few minutes  
but  
like his life  
his umbrella has a small hole in it  
he is wet

Washington August 1991

*Sinan Antoon*

\* **Sinan Antoon** is an Iraqi poet, born in Baghdad in 1967. He moved to the United States after the second Gulf war. He is currently the Arabic editor of *Journal of the Arab Studies*, published by Georgetown University.



*Kiowa Funeral, James Auchiah, Kiowa*

## THE LAST PEACE

*Translated by Sinan Antoon*

you bargain with me  
over my horse, my spear and my shield  
on the day of the battle  
you want to buy my arrows  
with what?  
with those promises  
that gave away land to the aggressors  
and gave its sons titles for disgrace  
banishment  
and wandering in "nowhere"

"peace..." and you throw me out of my country  
in the name of peace  
you cancel my return  
shut my own door in my face  
you deprive me  
of the fragrance of the fields  
and of the scent of the earth  
my gardens exude

"peace..." that deprives me of my clothes  
and of my being  
burns all the chapters in my book



and uproots me  
you falsify the history of my land  
its human being  
what the heavens revealed  
and what the earth's womb has given over the years  
you turn over what is left of my land and my honor  
to the ferocious winds  
you drag me  
in the unwelcoming cities of exile  
that only welcome me  
to their prisons

"peace..." that surrenders me to my enemy  
forces me to turn over myself, by myself  
and throw it under his feet  
to be torn back and forth  
my weakness and my meekness  
are my weapons  
my selling everything for nothing  
is my struggle

"peace..."  
the sword, in its hand,  
turns me against myself  
for his sake  
I bury yesterday, today and tomorrow  
and yet  
you bargain with me  
over my skinny horse

take all my weapons  
I have none  
except what stones the earth bestows  
it will rain on them  
with what they promise

it will seize their lies  
for I still believe  
in God as my Lord  
and I can still say  
NO

THE STRAY SIDEWALK

I walked astray  
searching for the door clappers  
I stood at each door  
I saw it being knocked  
without a hand

I searched the markets  
for those who do not stint  
the measures and scales  
I entered each store  
I found them selling and buying  
mirages

I headed to a cafe  
there was tea, coffee and scattered tables  
but no patrons  
there was a crowd of flies

I carried my heavy heartaches  
and faced the House of God  
to take my burdens off at his door  
wash myself in his prayers  
and converse with the truth  
when I was there  
I found the doorman  
tearing the Book apart!

I murmured for a while  
then watched the sidewalk  
the goers come  
the comers go  
the sidewalk aggravates the wailing  
a wave pushes another

amid the rush  
they step on each other  
nonchalantly  
when I gazed  
I saw that they had no eyes

I screamed aloud  
no one answered  
I still scream aloud  
no one answers  
when I stared  
I found that they had no ears

I stopped each passerby  
shook them  
they shook their tired heads  
and shrugged  
with no answer  
they went on  
coming and going  
when I stared  
I found that they had no tongues

to be able to see  
I shut my eyes  
to be able to speak  
I folded my tongue  
and I went on  
torturing the sidewalk  
running in their midst  
like them, I was searching  
in the human being  
for the human being.

*Qasim Alwazir*



**Amira El-Zein**

**TWO POEMS  
DEUX POÈMES**

## THE LAND OF MIRRORS

*Translated by Husain Haddawy*

When your water reaches me,  
The cup trembles  
And throngs of people vanish from my sight.  
When I drink the water  
The snow melts,  
Longing for the water—  
And rings of gold unfasten.

I enter the cup  
And join the rings and return to you,  
O land of mirrors,  
Led to you by women  
Whose coughing blows the air  
And covers me with dust.  
When I reach you, I hear  
The rain fall from my being,  
And I see the streams of my valleys  
Swell and flow toward your mouth  
And see your houses  
Hanging in the mirror,  
Glowing between two suns,  
Their curtains neither open nor shut,  
Between a question of darkness

And a reply of light.  
I enter, I enter a boat of gold  
And return to you,  
O land of mirrors,  
The strands of my pain sprout.  
I see in the mirror a skein of gold.  
I hug it and untie it  
And hold the thread.  
It writhes with pain with the needle.  
As I darn my dress in the land of mirrors,  
The river flows from my dress.  
As the thread rises and falls with my breath,  
The cloth becomes tight,  
And my feet wither,  
While the streams of my valleys swell  
And flow toward your mouth,  
O land of mirrors.

I return to you without memory,  
To see you as dough in the hands of women  
And see you flee toward the fire  
And burn without memory.  
Shall I gaze into the mirror,  
To drink my coffee and invent  
A memory for you?  
Shall I gaze, to find  
The horizon in smoke,  
To find myself clothed  
With the feathers of a black raven  
And the sky drinking coffee with me?  
I weep to see you burning  
With my memory.

I have forgotten that I was  
A river in your earth.

Is this the reason why I rage and cry  
From head to toe?  
Is this the reason why all the colors  
Of my forests turn dark  
Longing to your suns?  
Is this the reason why I see you  
Without my memory  
As rings of gold open one by one  
And are thrown into the water?

Yesterday, I lifted the veil of fate  
And gazed into its depths  
And saw obscurities teaming  
With creatures of the dark,  
Using their claws for mirrors,  
Leaving your hills an eaten cluster of grapes.  
Do your moons hide from me to test themselves?

O land of mirrors,  
I hid my garden in my pocket  
And said, "Tomorrow I will write you a poem."  
When I awoke, I found the old chief of my memory  
Shaking hands with the sacred tree  
And conversing with it.  
O chief, how did you fill my poem  
With the leaves of the tree?  
How did you dig up the past  
Like a piece of cloth you folded  
And threw under my window—  
Bits of my memory:  
Squares, triangles, pyramids, a pinch of salt—  
While I wept and wrote my poem for you?

I open the rings of gold  
And throw them in the water,



Saying, "I will find you."

O land of mirrors,  
The howling of the wolf  
Reaches me from your valleys,  
Bringing me news of tall giants  
Who carry your body to the horizon's pit.  
The singing of sparrows  
Reaches me from your mountains.  
Water rises in my mouth  
Like bare trees.  
Ah! I choke, I bend, I double with pain.  
The pain comes to me,  
And when it goes away,  
The water flows.  
Your breezes come to me and touch me,  
While a headache rolls over me  
Like stones from your mountain peaks.

How can I return to you,  
Now that you are without memory?  
A liquid voice comes to me, asking,  
"How did you write your poem?  
And why do people whisper around me,  
And wild flowers shake their heads?"  
I shiver with cold and dig up  
The floor of my room,  
To see you lying  
In the grave of my memory,  
O land of mirrors!

## IL EST TEMPS

Il est temps  
Que nous pêchions le corail  
De la mer  
Que nous choisissons nos formes

Il est temps que la brise  
De nos ancêtres  
Se répande  
Et caresse nos joues!

Il est temps que nos vies  
Se précipitent à la vitesse  
De nos poulx

Comment viendra l'heure  
Quand nos tristesses  
Sont accrochées au sommet des montagnes  
Mince filet d'eau  
Que les bergers  
Boivent à grands traits  
En s'exclamant:  
"Est-il vrai que l'heure est venue?"

Comment viendra l'heure  
Quand nous ramons dans le vent  
Sur des fleurs  
Qui pensent étrangement?

Les djinns s'écrient:  
"Il est temps  
Que vous partiez  
Vers des villages heureux  
Où les habitants vous offrent  
Une neige pure  
Que vous frottez dans vos mains  
Et vous vous exclamez:  
"Ah! Est-il vrai que l'heure  
Est venue pour nous!"

Comment viendra l'heure  
Quand nous marchons  
Jour après jour  
Vers là  
Où il pleut  
Sur nos tombes?

Comment viendra l'heure  
Quand nous entendons toujours  
Le crépitement  
De nos souvenirs  
Qu'ils brûlent  
Derrière nous?

Comment viendra l'heure  
Quand nous marchons  
Ivres  
Vers le livre pas encore écrit?

Comment viendra l'heure  
Quand le vide est toujours  
Sans couleurs?

Les djinns répètent:  
"Il est temps  
Que vous alliez  
Dans la lumière  
Qui descend des collines  
Du ciel  
Dans l'arbre heureux  
Qui triomphe du vent!"

Comment viendra l'heure  
Quand nous entendons toujours  
Des sons étouffés  
Autour de nous  
Et les voix basses de nos mères:  
"Qui a ouvert la fenêtre?"

Comment viendra l'heure  
Quand nos mains  
Tremblent entre  
Deux ablutions  
Et l'eau coule  
De nos paumes?

"Il est temps  
Disent les djinns  
Que vous veniez à nous  
Dans une forêt  
Que nous éclairons  
De nos petites lunes!"  
Et que d'autres forêts  
Comme elle

vous visitent dans vos  
Rêves!"

Comment viendra l'heure  
Quand nous dormons toujours  
Sur nos côtes droites?  
J'écris

Et la douleur persiste  
Nos côtés droits  
Tournés vers le soleil  
Qui embrase la chambre  
De nos enfances

**Nous nous souvenons:**

Nos pères jetaient  
derrière eux  
Les meubles du passé

La douleur persiste  
Dans nos côtés droits  
Tandis que j'écris:  
**"Il est temps!"**

La douleur persiste  
Dans nos côtés droits  
Jusqu'à ce que la famille  
Se disperse de nouveau

Les morts  
Ferment leurs portes

Et les vivants  
S'assoient  
Dans leurs jarres

Ils comptent les jours  
Les jarres se fêleront  
Et les eaux de la mort  
Couleront  
En coton de nuit

J'écris encore:  
**Il est temps**  
En lettres noires

Le calme descend  
Dans ma côte droite  
Jusqu'au couchant suivant  
Ou plutôt  
Jusqu'au jour suivant  
Quand m'appelle  
Le soleil de mes morts

"Le temps viendra"  
Chantent avec moi  
Les djinns  
En hochant la tête  
"Où nous parlerons  
Comme se parlent  
Les arbres  
La nuit  
Où nous nous appellerons  
Comme s'appellent  
les loups  
La nuit"

"Le temps viendra"  
Chantent les djinns  
En hochant la tête

"Où nous sautillerons  
Comme des oiseaux  
Un sautillement  
Par seconde"

"Le temps viendra"  
Je chante  
Je chante avec les djinns  
"Le temps viendra"  
Où nous nous transformerons  
En équations de lumière  
Pour retrouver le pays

Tandis que j'écrivais le poème  
Un djinn est venu  
Il a ouvert une porte  
Entre deux lignes  
Un autre l'a suivi  
Pour séparer "il est venu"  
Et le "temps"

Je les suivis  
Je vis une grotte  
Illuminée de ce poème  
Et un cheval blanc  
Hennissait au-dessus

Et je vis mon poème  
Se plier  
Se répandre  
Se plier encore  
Se répandre encore

Et je vis les djinns  
Laper l'eau

De leurs langues  
Les loups s'enfuir  
Et aboyer au loin!

Je quittai "est venu"  
Je quittai "il est temps"

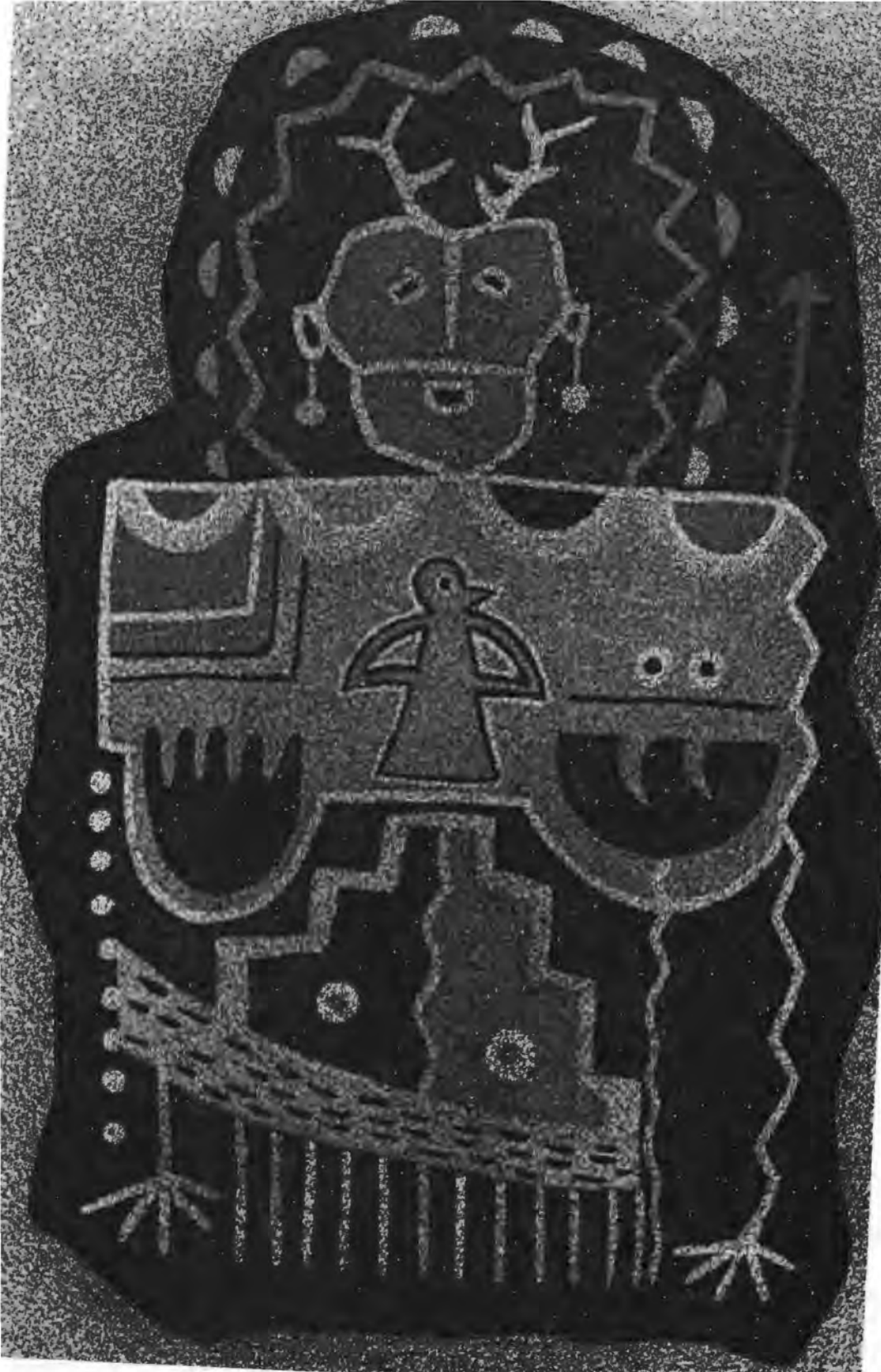
Je fixai du regard  
Le poème

Et je disparus!

*Amira El-Zein\**

\*Je remercie mon amie, l'écrivain Christine Ray  
pour avoir lu ce poème et pour ses suggestions.





## THE KEENING OF THE REED

He put his paw in the lake  
    like one dipping a quill in a well of words...  
He wasn't of reed,  
nor has Love a thing to grant:  
Among beasts there is no wolf worthy of the loneliness  
    of snow.

He goes past...  
taken by a stifled wail—  
between him and home are Night and its Form,  
    Sleep and its latest dream.

He claims to strike into the map of Man,  
announcing his trip, binding pacts with place;

Shackled spirit...  
and for his tarrying, his body slackens,  
    limb by torn limb.

He counts Night vehicles,  
opens Dream friendship to the Stone:  
snow thicker than nature's bounty,  
Mountain messages in Night's quay,

lightweight stone, swaying and  
speaking like books on a shelf.

Why do you postpone your going, when  
you are not here?  
None goes your extent but the Absent one, the  
Consort of Caravans.  
Why do you construct citadels, inhabit them,  
for visitors' fear to befall you, like the enemy?  
Why isn't time enough for you,  
why doesn't place suffice ?  
Where'd you get all this desolation,  
when you're an eden of blades?

Leave your hand in the lake,  
spread a quillfeather to fly you away:  
horizons broaden for you;  
promised appointments are postponed—  
leave speech to its own devices —Write !—  
nature reads your only snow.

He came crammed with crying,  
no shoulder for him, no flow,  
counting his shirts exhausted by excesses of the road,  
cheating sleep at night lest the hand of distance extend to him...  
When will he sleep light-hearted, wounded emotions still,  
streaming like an orphan, forgotten by bereaved mothers,  
neglected by wetnurses?

He comes as if he will not go,  
arranging the room's stones, preparing like a squadron  
for attack.  
He spells out "Passage" as if in exile's gloom,  
a wolf whose name has no letters,  
whose lair is writing's outback,

loss of folk;  
one deep in alienation,  
announcing he is daring/bold.

He will go—  
he will go because he came from nowhere,  
he will go in order to confirm that "map" has a name  
other than home and the keening of the reed—

Love,  
take body from him, leave him soul,  
make his trip not an emigration,  
wipe his lamp's glass with your mercy  
so sleep befalls him,  
sleep for one night, before death  
and after.

Love, this is your consort;  
take him:  
lazy messenger between lake and sea.

*Qasim Haddad*

\* *Qasim Haddad*, a leading Arab poet from Bahrain. Among his latest publications are three books of poetry: "*Queens' Solitude*," "*Qasim's Grave*" and "*Majnun Layla*".



Ibou Diouf, *Les Trois Épouses* (The Three Wives), 1974., tapestry.  
Collection of the Government of Senegal

## THE NIGHTINGALE OF REVENGE

(Exerpts)

After the thousand and one night, they sat facing each other inside the freshly - dug grave; naked except for their new, rustling shrouds. Each had a loaded gun on his lap, aimed at point-blank range to the other's heart.

Finger on the trigger.

The moon of their lives was full, lying prostrate under the reflection of the Sun. And they had to go together, at the same instant, before the first millimeter of Earth shadow fell on the full moon of their lives.

She covered his face and her own.

She recited "*La ilaha illa Allah*" for both their souls and, then, blew off the lantern of their lives.

Everything came to an end. The fire had consumed its wood, and Shehrezade fell silent for the last time.

### SAID THE CONCUBINE

A huge man with shaven head came to the child that I was at that time, patted her head, and gave her a piece of sweets. He smiled to her and asked if she liked it.

The sweet was really delicious but the child was poor and unaccustomed to the fiery happiness which sweets leave in childrens' throats. She said "thank you" in the language of Circassia which she spoke at the time.

He smiled again. Like a kindly uncle he smiled in her face and said in a tender voice,

"There, in the luggage on my horse I have another piece for you. It's bigger and sweeter."

She followed him, intoxicated by the lovely taste in her throat. From behind his saddle, he pulled out a black sack, she was certain that the sweets were somewhere inside it. She smiled victoriously and wrung her hands in happiness. The bald big man spread the sack over her tiny body and pushed her inside it. All that time she kept a smile on her face; she thought he was playing some game with her.

Someday, I'll proudly stand in front of the throne of God and say to Him,

"Look what Your creation have done to me. Since the beginning of her childhood and until this moment, this poor servant of yours had remained inside that black sack trying to live the life you have ordained for her - without ever losing her smile."

I'll say to Him,

" O, Merciful God! I have found a King in the desert, picked him up, cleared away the dust of his sorrows and wore him like a necklace around my neck. If it were in my power to give him *Al Muntazar* ( the Expected One) to liberate the world from black sacks, I wouldn't have hesitated. But that was beyond my power. "

I'll say to Him.

" I am content to come to You in his company. Forgive me my Lord. I found him the best companion in my trip to You."

In that way I shall speak to the King of Kings.

Then I went to the king of my life, pulled him into the fresh grave, put the weapon into his lap and put the muzzle of the gun into my mouth.

The door of Life slammed behind us in a great explosion.

\* \* \*

I have lived in Damascus and Istanbul, visited the House of God and the city of the Prophet. What else is there to see?"

We drove in a horse-drawn carriage through the streets of Istanbul with a group of joyful girls. From behind the drawn curtains we watched fountains, Sarais, cafes and Pashas. We drove through wide avenues and small alleys, until we reached the sea, saw the ships and heard their melancholic sirens. Our driver said it was the sea that joined together all parts of the world. The shameless devil, he actually said the navel of the world.

Then we saw the Magician in one of the city squares. We bought *Baqlava*, almonds, nuts and everything. The big girls agreed to ask our master to bring the Magician to our Sarai so that we enjoy his magic. Each one of them made the same request when she had her night with him. He agreed and brought us the wonderful man who pulled pigeons and rabbits from his jacket, spat fire from his lungs and made silk handkerchiefs tie up of their own accord. A girl from Serbia swore that all these wonders were not miracles, that they were tricks based on deception and sleight of hand. When we refused to believe her she said her father, who had sold her to the slave-dealers, practised those tricks. Then she wept and cursed the memory of her father.

Damascus is also a great city, but what is the whole world compared to Istanbul?

We had very few girls in Damascus. I was practically alone with some elderly slave-women. My master was a young man, nearly of my age. He was guarded by a whole army of maternal and paternal aunts. Veiled men came to the house and kissed his hands and called him 'Master'. He did not speak Turkish and I spoke not a single word of Arabic. In the first day he gave me a nice present: a doll, a nice black girl. The next day he gave me another doll; a black boy. Under the clothes, the secret parts were sculptured with unbeatable precision and with the help of the dolls and without any Turkish or Arabic we



reached the depths of sensuality and learned the language of the hungry adolescent body.

He was a gentle dreamy boy, handsome like a prince. When we were alone he mocked his stern aunties, veiled his face like his mysterious visitors and reverently kissed my hands. His aunties took me with them to pray in the mosque. After prayers they bought me Damascene sweets and Lebanese apples. Oh my God, how delicious, those apples were. You take a bite and sweetness races the lovely scent to your mouth and nostrils. God! It is more than thirty years ago since I last tasted those apples but the memory of their sweetness is still on my palate and the tip of my tongue.

\* \* \*

They took me to a chateau in Anatolia and told me it was a school. It was surrounded by graceful Cypress trees. Beyond them were vines sloping off the shoulder of the mountain down to the valley where a small brook flowed over the gravelly sands.

The chateau was full of rooms, the rooms full of girls of every race and every age. The female overseers were armed with canes, the eunuchs with whips. Nevertheless we were able to sing, dance and have a little happiness while learning Turkish language and the secrets of the body.

We, the smaller girls, were less fortunate and more frequently punished. Big girls were much happier. They fooled around with the eunuchs and made friends with the overseers.

Food was good. Each girl ate in her own plate and had to eat up all the rice, bread and meat they put on her plate. I was the first of my batch to move on to the group of big girls. I guess that was because I was so tall.

We were a bunch of vulgar little girls who traded obscenities all the time. Sex was the food we ate, the air we breathed, and the dreams we saw in our sleep. Everything was permitted except losing our virginity with a man. Nonetheless, there were exciting rumors about a certain group of girls who

were able to seduce one of the eunuchs. They found him very wholesome and had a nice time with him. All that was fantasy, indeed.

Finally it was my turn to be with him. I met him in the garden.

" They fooled you, " he said and cried the way women cry. Then he went and told it all to one of the overseers. She said something obscene and did something very unbecoming to my body.

In that school, in that chateau surrounded by vineyards, they taught us how to distort natural sex into a profession, how to follow its rules of marketing and publicity. Exploiting our sexual deprivation, they made us succumb to every perversion you can think of. It became our dream to be sold off to a master who wanted a concubine for himself but not to a dealer who wanted to make a few gold pieces in profit.

My heart fell between my ribs when they sold me off to a skinny old Jew. He was so old and so repulsive. A touch from his hand would have made me hate sex and give up its dreams forever. Fortunately my lucky star was to shine at the last moment. He hit me lightly with his cane and told me to take off my gown. He walked around me examining my naked body, then told me to dress and go away. Later on, the veiled men came, paid him a price and took me off to Damascus.

My new master was a young man, heir to titles that made the head turn. Veiled men served him, kissed his hands and called him 'Master'. He was indeed a gentle shy youth, but his religious position placed him far above other mortals. He was the descendant of a great race of nobles, scholars and rebels in whose name several kingdoms were established in the Levant. At that time the family was passing through a period of hibernation, and seemed to pin all its hopes on the gentle young man.

Two months later his aunties came and examined me. They said they had something nice and soft to bring back my

menstruation. It was not painful because pain started several hours later and I could not see the relation between the two things. For three miserable days I felt excruciating pains and was tormented by the continual urge to go to the bathroom. On one of those visits to the bathroom, I felt something heavy drop. I did not know what it was because in Damascene bathrooms water came in a continuous flow from diverted streams and never allowed you to find out what you had dropped.

Years later I noticed that, unlike other girls, I never got pregnant. When I told them what had happened to me in Damascus they said I had been subjected to a primitive abortion that caused my sterility. It seemed to me that that great family did not want to leave one of its offspring in the womb of a poor slave-girl whom they had bought for money.

\* \* \*

One of my masters was a Bedouin chief. He pitched a huge tent for me in the desert, fed me antelope meat and *Jameed* (sun-dried camel milk). He took my arms in his little strong hands and told me he wanted a son." Blonde and tall like his mother. In fact I leave it all to you. Give him the colour of your skin, the shape of your eyes and your level of intelligence. Do as you wish, but please give me a big strong male with almond eyes. I promise to raise him as a prince. I guarantee that he would become a great man, a jewel of his father's (and mother's) eyes."

He tried everything, but my womb refused to inflate.

Then a strange thing happened in the blessed city of the Prophet. It was carried from mouth to mouth until it reached us in the desert and rekindled our hopes for the blonde pretty heir.

A pigeon, they said, had flown into the holy shrine and died there. No one had seen it enter, but the strange smell indicated what had happened. The people wondered what to do. Finally they agreed to entrust the duty of taking it out to someone who was really pure, someone who had never sinned or had carnal knowledge of women. They chose a twelve-year

old boy known for his piety and good manners. He was the purest of the pure.

He was ushered into the holy shrine, took out the dead pigeon and during these brief moments inside the shrine, he had seen whatever he had seen, heard whatever he had heard, and ever since, had never uttered a word to a living soul. He closed his mouth, tied his tongue and did nothing but pray to God. Rumor had it that a divine spirit had taken hold of him. He had become a saint, a patron of sterile women.

" Go to him in the blessed City. You'll find him praying. Put your gift on his prayer-mat, tell him you are sterile, beseech him to ask God to grant your wish. You'll get what you want. It has happened to so many people before you."

We travelled to the holy city. We found the angelically handsome boy. Oh yes he was praying. We put our valuable gift on the prayer-mat and softly whispered to him,

" We have no offspring. We want a child, a boy."

" Even a girl would do. Yes, even a girl," I added.

The miracle happened. My womb inflated, my belly jutted out and my master was certain that his blonde heir was on the way. Then my belly deflated and nothing came of it.

We realized it was the will of God.

\* \* \*

May I mourn my father,  
If, ever, I tasted anything  
Sweeter than his lips

May I be stricken,  
If I do not make my arm a pillow  
For the head of the Yemeni boy.

Oh! The agony of memory.  
He was a boy from Yemen, with a wild moustache of

which the hairs pierced and caressed. His voice was heavenly. He knew the greatest love songs and sang them out with murderous sweetness to disembowel the hearts of lonesome women.

He sang and I accompanied him. From time to time, he turned and encouraged me with his wonderful words:

"Yes, my Princess. Sing, chant, chirp, intone, hum, croon!"

When my master saw his fondness for me, he allowed him to kiss my feet each time he sang an air that my master particularly liked. At that, fires went up to my cranium from the touch of his singing lips and his combative moustache.

Once, an aging Kurdish woman told me,

"Those who cannot afford the price of a slave-girl, they are the true lovers."

Later, the Yemeni boy became a big star, then a big trader while I changed hands from one master to another. Meanwhile the fire was extinguished. When we met at his bazaar, years later, he greeted me nicely and gave me a necklace for a gift.

I sold it for a little price and bought hashish for my girlfriends who smoked the stuff.

\* \* \*

I warned her by word of mouth, by the whispers of my heart while she was arranging her make-up and decorating her palms with Henna. She told the girls she intended to eviscerate my existence by stealing my weekly night with him, and then I warned her not to try. Finally, after she had stolen the first night, I gave her a beating. I took her mouth in my hands and gagged her, tried to suffocate her, to end her trivial existence, but she bit me. When I tried to withdraw my hand, she held it tightly in her cowardly teeth and gave me those white scars.

The next time, she received a perfect flailing. I struck her face and gave her those black circles around the eyes. Then I

used the worthy weapon for her sort - my shoe. I kicked every part of her body, tore up her clothes and covered her body with the blows of the defiling shoe. She then went and complained to him and, in consolation, he gave her my night.

He was hopelessly fond of tears and drama. He wrote poetry about deprivation in love (not deprived love) and twisted and mewled within its iambuses like a cat in heat. However, he had a wife and five concubines. It is true that he no longer touched the aging Kurdish woman, that he had sold the fat mulatto, but those who remained were enough for him and he was less than enough for them. Still, maybe, it was right for him to depict his deprivation in poetry because a man who marries such filth like that woman should go on for ever weeping over his bereft life.

I was hiding behind the curtains when she walked down the corridor to his room to steal my night with him and degrade me in the eyes of the girls. There was no one except the two of us. I could see her, but she couldn't have seen me. Nevertheless, she turned in my direction and made a sign of cheap victory. It was the lowliness of her soul that told her I might be somewhere around and that such a sign would cut deep into my heart.

She opened the palm of her left hand, put the fist of the right hand inside it and slowly moved it in a circular motion telling me, in the venomous language of beastly jealousy, that she was going to rub my heart to the ground just like that. Oh, there was so much venom in that gesture.

In my hiding-place behind the curtains, in that empty corridor, with no witness except God, the Book of her Fate opened before my eyes and I read in it that her Death would be by my hand.

Muhammed El-Mekki

\* **Mohammed El-Mekki:** Sudanese and retired diplomat, currently on long visit to the United States. Among his other works are his verse collections: *You the Nectar, Me the Orange* and *The Garden Hides in the Rose*.



Acha Debela, *Journey to the Unknown*, Acrylic on canvas.  
Collection of the University of Maryland, College Park.

## THE HILL OF GYPSIES

Translated from the Arabic by

*Denys Johnson-Davies*

My grandfather was at the threshold of the house, while I was stretched out on my stomach along the sloping date palm, astride it as on a bride. I raised my head and called out: 'Grandpa.'

Enveloped in a blue broadcloth cloak, he was peering in my direction with feeble eyes. I told myself: 'He's back from market.' Under the trellis the animals were chewing the cud dreamily, and the dog Antar was running in play from wall to wall with the young billy goat. From before sunset cool breezes had been blowing, and the cafe radio had been blaring out the 'Allah is great' that announces the start of Ramadan.

'Grandpa.'

He propped himself against the trunk of the sloping date palm, and I came down so as to be near him.

'Did you water the animals?' he shouted

'Yes, Grandpa.'

'You mixed the fodder with beans?'

'Yes, Grandpa.'

'Sprinkle some water in front of the house, then water the two orange trees and the olive tree, and let loose the young calf.'

'All right, Grandpa.'

Stretching out his hand he brushed away the hair from



my forehead.

'How old is the date palm, Grandpa?'

'Very old, as old as your forefathers.'

'And you, how old are you, Grandpa?'

'Very old.'

'From the days of Orabi for instance.'

'And who's told you about Orabi?'

'We have him in our history book.'

He smiled and patted me on the back. 'Good for you.'

There were some stones lying about below the wall, and the light of dusk was emptying itself into the sky before the sunset prayer of Ramadan. I looked into his face and remembered that whenever my father would scold me harshly for neglecting my studies, I would run to my grandfather and take refuge in his embrace; I would hear him telling my father off: 'You'll go on at him till you do for him.' He used to seat himself, then take my head and put it on his lap and I would hear him reviling unknown persons. I'd see him point towards the shade traced on the wall, while with his foot he would rock me to sleep and wouldn't wake me till I'd woken up of my own accord.

He plunged his hand into his cloak and brought it out and waved it in front of me.

I was astonished when I saw the coloured sun glowing behind him. Clapping my hands together, I called out: 'Hey! A Ramadan lantern, A Ramadan lantern!'

I jumped to my feet. Whenever I stretched out my hand to take it my grandfather raised it higher.

'Allah keep you, Grandpa—let me have the lantern, don't tease me.'

He burst out laughing and said to me: 'It cost twenty piastres, you rascal. You don't deserve it. Guard it like your eyes and enjoy yourself, my dear fellow.'

He removed with his hand the stones that were on the ground, then took off his broadcloth cloak and spread it out

along the stretch of shade and placed his turban on the stump of the branch of the mulberry tree. He lay down on the cloak, placing his right arm over his eyes, and his beard looked to me as though it were teased cotton.

'Run off,' he said to me, 'to where your father and uncles are and see if they've finished irrigating the Mirza field or whether they'll be spending the night in the fields.'

'Right away, Grandpa. Right away.'

'Tell your Grandma to moisten the dates and the liquorice. I'm really thirsty today.'

'Right away, Grandpa.'

Sleep made its stealthy way to him from the mulberry tree. He became distracted, then closed his eyes, yet he still went on talking.

'Mind you wake me before the sunset prayer, for I shall be paying a visit to the departed.'

When he talked of things I didn't understand he would be on the threshold of sleep.

'Light the lantern, but beware of going to the hill of the gypsies.'

His breathing became regular and his chest began moving up and down; he snored softly.

I said to myself: 'The hill of the gypsies—what had brought it to his mind? And why should I go there? And who would show me the way up to where the buildings ended, to where one can't walk and the wind howls in the graveyard trees.'

'Beware of the hill of the gypsies. They snatch children and make tattoo marks on their chests and call them by names other than their own.'

He began to dream, to talk nonsense.

I left him and went off, waving the coloured lantern.

At the door I was met by my mother with her head covered. When she saw the lantern she said: 'Congratulations, Abdul Mawla.' I told her joyfully that my grandfather had

brought it for me from the town, and she smiled at me. I said to her: 'Why, when he goes to sleep, does my grandfather talk about the gypsies?' My mother said to me: 'The gypsies are also Allah's servants, and they are not to be feared.' She mentioned Galila to me and said: 'And have you forgotten Galila the gypsy, Abdul Mawla?'

'Galila...Galila.' I repeated the name to myself and looked at the yellowed sun. My chest was filled with the smell of scalding milk.

Galila the gypsy. Ah!

Three tattoo lines on the chin and the green spot to one side of her straight nose; a beauty spot like a raisin that death itself would not erase. The crescent earrings shook when she moved her head, glistening. Eyes of divine kohl in which wandered a mysterious inscrutability. The appeal they had in the hearts of my mother and her aunts was one of life's secrets.

'We make divination in sand, we see luck in sea-shells. We reveal all.'

'Come here, Galila.'

And on the ground of the alleyway, and under the male mulberry tree, she would spread the handkerchief and place on it the grains of soft sand. The kohl-black eye looks into the eyes of the village women, captivated by her hidden magic. The fingers mark out life's pathways, bringing into being the destinies of people: roads opened to good fortune, their endings weddings for virgins; peace of mind at the return of the absent. A year of bounty, udders abundant with milk, the grain-stores full of the good things and the blessings of the fields. But perils, like predators, are lying in wait in the womb of the unknown, envious and hating. And the Lord of His servants, the Savior, and His Messenger a guardian, and the righteous are not harmed. And you are good and righteous, O Amina, daughter of al-Mursi, and your son Abdul Mawla is protected from the evil eye and from the iniquities of the devils.

I listen to her voice and emerge from sleep. Passing

through the door, I look for an instant into her eye, which was not the colour of ashes but of light. I am pinned to the ground at the threshold, between the darkness of the house and the blaze of the sun.

Her dress is of light linen, fashioned with circles that reveal a slip the colour of garden roses.

She took me in her arms and the smell of her sweat filled me to overflowing. She said to me: 'O son of the precious.' I felt my head in her bosom and my heart raced madly. She kissed me on the mouth and my aunts laughed. 'Leave the boy alone, you saucy wench. Sister, she's brazen and has no shame; she doesn't care a damn.'

The gypsy girl laughs and my good-natured mother says to her: 'Don't stay away—we miss you, Galila.' The gypsy replies to her: 'Earning one's daily bread is full of hardship, mother of Abdul Mawla.'

When she draws away from me I shudder and hear my heart beating. I see her lifting her dress and revealing the calf of her leg as she looks towards me. 'Let's be seeing you, Abdul Mawla'—and she disappears in the bend of the road. Her voice carries across the valley: 'We make divination, we see luck in sea-shells. All is revealed.'

She disappears and there remains in my heart her voice and the promise that I shall see her. After the meal for breaking the fast and drinking tea and performing the prayer, I lit the lantern. When its light was dispersed, my grandfather was delighted and he gazed at the splendour of colours spread out on the ground. I pushed the gate of the fence and went out into the lane. I heard my uncle's voice warning me: 'Take care of the lantern.'

The lane was crowded with children and a gathering of young girls. In the houses they were busy with making pastries for the Feast, and the café radio blared out religious formulas and the glorification of Allah.

Seeing my lantern, the children gathered round me. They

walked along behind me, their shadows falling on the ground. We went up to where the tomb of Abu Husein lies on the canal.

‘There’s Sidi Abu Husein,’ I shouted.

The wind roared in the high branches.

‘My mother says his secret powers are overwhelming and that he has performed miracles.’

‘And he has done favours and miracles for the whole village.’

‘And he sets the clouds in motion and the rain descends.’

‘That’s Allah who does it, you ignorant thing. It is He who will raise you up on the Day of Final Judgement so that you and your father go to Hell and my grandfather and I go to Heaven.’

The children laughed and looked at the lantern whose light had grown dim. Shafika said: ‘The candle spluttered and the light’s gone out.’

‘Tomorrow you’ll buy a candle, Abdul Mawla, and you’ll light up the lantern.’

‘Tomorrow’s the night of the twenty-seventh, the Night of Power’

The night of Power, which is to say that tomorrow celestial light will be opened, prayers will be answered, and we’ll go to the hill of the gypsies. I drew the attention of the children and they answered in one voice: ‘The hill of the gypsies? Not likely!’

They were silent, then quickly rejoined: And why not? we’ll go.’

In the morning I said to my father: ‘Give me five piastres,’ and when he asked me ‘Why?’ I said to him: ‘To buy a candle.’ He shouted at me: ‘And what about yesterday’s candle?’ I said to him: ‘It’s finished.’ Again he barked: So, you son of your mother, you’ll be wanting five piastres every day.’ I said: ‘Father, tonight’s the Night of Power, and I must light the lantern.’

My father raised the head of the axe and I screamed. I

backed away and my foot sank into the mud of the cattle-pen and I noticed the baby calf sucking at the teat of its restless mother, which was turning round on itself. I heard my grandfather's voice near the door saying to my father: 'What's wrong with you?' and I heard my father reply: 'By Allah, Father, you've brought us a real headache he wants a candle.'

He unfolded his old brown wallet and undid the buttons. I could hear the click of the buttons as they were opened, and I was full of happiness. No sooner did I see the five piastre piece than I grasped hold of His Majesty the King and heard my father shout: 'This is how you'll spoil him.' Then I went round all the village shops asking for a candle, from the river lane to the other side, and from the lowland right up to Maris's land. And I shouted inwardly: 'What a lousy day!' I arrived at the house shaking and screamed at my mother: 'I want a candle,' and I kicked up the dust and threw a stone at the window of the upper floor. My mother stopped kneading the dough and bawled at me: 'And what's got into you, Abdul Mawla? Calm down. Where do you think we'll get you a candle from?'

My uncle Ahmed shouted at me: 'The devil take you, you never finish asking for things. Go up to the room on the roof and you'll find a small tin lamp, just the size of the lantern. Clean it and fix a wick in it, then fill it with oil and give us a bit of peace. It was a crazy idea.'

I stopped crying and went up to my uncle and said to him: 'And this lamp where is it, Uncle?' He answered me: 'Up above—in the window to the right of the door as you enter.'

I rushed up the stairs and opened the door of the room on the roof. I searched on the window sill and came across the lamp. I found it to be old, knocked about till it was the size of a large frog. It was covered with rust and dust from being left there so long, lurking amidst wooden spoons and a ball of string and old seals bearing names that had long disappeared, contracts for land dated ages ago. I actually found a dagger with a gleaming blade inside a leather scabbard. I whispered to

myself: A dagger and a lantern.'

I gathered up bolls of cotton and a complete wick, and I washed the lamp with mud and dust, and scoured it with petrol, then filled it and fitted the wick.

At night I lighted the lantern and gathered the children behind me, and we hurried off to where the hill of the gypsies was. We left the village behind us and plunged into the darkness by the light of the lantern, and I saw a small quantity of smoke rising up from the burning wick and blackening the sides.

We passed by the shack of Umm Bilal, that good-for-nothing woman who had no relatives. I saw her standing by her shack close to the water-pump. I greeted her and she returned my greeting and asked: 'Where are you off to, children?' and we replied in one voice: 'To the hill of the gypsies.' The woman laughed in a voice that scared us. Waving her hand towards us, she called out: 'The hill of the gypsies? You, you undersized worthless lot. Go back, you naughty boys. You're not up to gypsies. If you go there they'll kidnap you and castrate you like goats. They'll open up your stomachs and take out your intestines, then fill them with salt, embalm you and hang you up at the doors of their tents.'

We were frightened and our feet were rooted to the ground. The night around us seemed to stretch away. Sa'id Badr made off with Madi behind him, and they went back home.

We hastened on, penetrating deeply into the night. As we walked the light dwindled; the flame was imprisoned amidst the layer of soot that covered the coloured glass.

A wind blew up and the trees shook. From afar, from amongst the graves, rose the howling of a wolf. Stars twinkled in the sky. Our voices were held captive as we clasped hands in fear. 'The worst is over, boys,' I said. 'The hill's close by.'

I heard my voice but no reply.

The lantern's wick quivered and went out. Darkness as black as kohl descended. Shafika wept and called out:



'I'm frightened.'

I raised the lantern and said to them: 'Allah will cast celestial light upon the ground.'

'I want to go back.'

'I shall ask of Allah to lengthen my grandfather's life. What will you ask of Him, Shafika?'

'I'm going home,' cried out Othman, the youngest of us, and pleaded with Mongi: 'Come back with me, Mongi—my mother will kill me.'

The children separated themselves from me and hurried back towards the village. I went on alone to my destination. In my right hand I held my lantern whose colours had disappeared. I whispered to myself: 'I'll go on by myself even if the earth were to be filled with devils'—and when I mentioned the devils my whole body shuddered.

The fields closed in on me and I saw the trees stretching out their branches towards me, and I heard a rustling within the alfa grass. I took courage and said to myself: 'The devils are imprisoned in Ramadan. Calm yourself.' The voice of a curlew came to me, as though saying: 'Sovereignty is Yours. Sovereignty is Yours.' I became relaxed and I said to myself: 'It is I who am wrong, I was misled by the light of the lantern, and the ancient promise'—and I walked on, following the footsteps of the light.

I wanted to return but an attempt to do so would no longer be possible. From afar I heard the beating of drums carried by the wind. I noticed a newly born crescent moon, like a slice of water-melon, withdrawing into the sky. I whispered: 'The hill's far away and the moon is no guide.'

The hill came into view, tattooed with a few trees scattered on the sides. Three tents were illuminated by lamps attached to posts, palpitating and revealing hair tents huddled up close together.

I went up the hill and when I felt tired I sat down on a stone.



I saw them forming a circle and beating on drums and singing to the music of a flute and a *mizmar*. The tune was wafted to me, intimate and friendly.

I drew closer and saw the Mawawi, the chief the gypsies, standing under the large lamp. When I looked closely I found that he had braided locks and in his left ear a silver earring from which dangled small bells. When he raised his hands I saw that he wore on his fingers rings with bezels in the form of scarabs. Above his eyes the brows met, delineating the eyes of a hawk, while his teeth were capped with golden crowns and sparkled in the light of the gypsy fire whenever he laughed.

A gypsy of short stature moved to poke the fire with an iron prong and it blazed up. Another man had a snake, with raised head, curled about his arm; it bared its fangs and stared about it with unblinking eyes. A small monkey stood silently on his shoulder, its face expressing wisdom found in old men.

I grew tired of looking and of my apprehensions. It was as though I had nodded off. Had I been overcome by sleep? Or had the fire, the thumping of the drums and the smiling Mawawi cast a spell over me as I saw the celestial light opening out and winged angels descending and roaming around in the place, with the aromas of paradise being diffused? I said to myself: 'I'll pray for my grandfather. On the Night of Power no prayer is left unanswered'—and I saw a gypsy greeting the angels with drums, while the Mawawi pushed his way into the circle of gypsies, taking the hand of a gypsy girl of comely face and sleek figure, clothed in a silk dress, her waist drawn in with a green belt, an end of which hung down to her thigh. She had taken up a position in the middle of the circle and had begun to dance to the rhythm of the drum. Behind her there were opened up before me gateways to flowering gardens in which the angels still circled.

'Galila. Galila.'

I called out and the Mawawi became aware of my presence. He approached me. 'You came?' he said, smiling.

‘Ah,’ I said.

He drew me by the hand and I threw myself down on my back on a Stable. He placed his right hand on my chest and the woman with the tattoo and the crescent earrings brought the big cast iron bowl, with the steam rising from the warm water. I whispered: ‘Galila.’ The Mawawi asked for rosewater, ginger, saffron, camphor and white sandalwood, and he dissolved them in the water. I heard his voice mumbling: ‘The letter is the origin of speech, and the Throne stands on the letter’—and I did not understand.

When I inhaled the odour of the scent, I closed my eyes and said: ‘Perfume.’ I saw him opening his knife and putting a mark on my chest, and my alarm increased. He said: ‘Don’t be frightened,’ and he cleaved my chest and I groaned. Then I heard them intoning: ‘A speedy recovery.’

I saw my heart that had been plucked out throbbing in the palm of his hand. Blood flowed from it. I heard him calling to me: ‘Here you are seeing your own heart.’ I tried to stand up, but he stopped me. He said: ‘Guard your secret.’ I said: ‘I’m thirsty,’ and he said to them: ‘Give him to drink.’

He placed my heart in a container and its blood floated on the water. He washed it and cleaned it and wrote letters and words on it with a reed pen, and when I asked him what he was writing he replied that he knew what he was doing.

The beating of the drums and the sounds of the flute and the *mizmar* continued. Moths made their appearance above the gypsy fire, and the hill was illuminated by a heavenly resplendence.

He placed my heart in my chest and the stars that I would track until the end of my life were scattered about. I said to my grandfather, who was wearing a coloured loincloth and a vast turban on his head, and clasping a sceptre in his hand: ‘look, Grandpa, they are my stars.’ But he did not look. ‘debility,’ he said, ‘and long travelling is the heart’s punishment.’ Then he placed some dates in my hand and said, before his face

disappeared: 'Satisfy your hunger.'

The Mawawi shook me and asked me my name. Caught unawares, I forgot my name. The gypsy girl answered: 'Abdul Mawla,' and the Mawawi said: 'You'd gone a long way away, Abdul Mawla,' and he put a candle in the lantern after having washed it, and once again the coloured lights of the lantern came back. He said to me: 'Be careful of the stones and the runnels across the pathways. Go to your right at the next bend and you'll reach the village at daybreak.'

I went down from the armpit of the hill and walked between the cypresses and the eucalyptus trees, inhaling the night smell of perfume, and hearing the sound of singing, while to my right there gushed forth a flow of running water.

*Said Al-Kafrawi*

## HOMECOMING

*Translated by Denys Johnson-Davies*

I remember now how happy I felt as I left the 'Merkaz Hakleta'<sup>(1)</sup> bearing a new name, the key to a house and a small suitcase.

My wife Yael was following, her cheeks flushed. I would turn to her and see the yearning in her concealing the fatigue of those years. Grasping the plan of the city, I would come to a stop, put down the suitcase and open out the plan. Yael would come up close. That is Ben Yehuda Street. From here there's a turning off. No mistake - and I would fold up the plan.

'Home at last!'

When I recall the moment we stood spellbound in front of the arched wooden gateway, with an emotion we were unable to give expression to, I couldn't believe that this had happened to me: Dan Ben Schmitt, architect and an Israeli citizen. It could so easily have happened to some other person, someone whose name was Karl and was perhaps a German immigrant.

I carefully carried the key, blackened with time and carefully concealed under my clothes, to the door.

We entered apprehensively and descended some steps leading to a hall surrounded by closed doors. Tales of genies and haunted houses ranged through my head. My knees felt

weak, so I sat down on a bench while Yael hurried towards the closed doors and before I could call to her, she had pushed them all open.

There was nothing behind the empty spaces of darkness: the house was unoccupied.

Throwing her arms round me, Yael exclaimed:

'Our home!'

When the feeling of joyful surprise had quietened down, I was able to pull myself together and look around me with an architect's eye.

The house was excessively oriental in character. Yet we could none the less put an iron railing round the courtyard, and we could cut down the fig tree that grew in the middle. A curtain here, a pot of artificial flowers there... Everything was going to be fine. However, not a week had passed before I heard Yael's voice calling me urgently from the living room.

'Karl - hurry!'

I guessed that something was wrong, for she had been taught during our six months' stay at the Merkaz Hakleta to forget my former name.

Seeing me, she pointed at the wall:

'Look what I've found.'

I peered closely at the wall: there were drawings and scribbles etched into it with powerful insistence.

'How is it we didn't notice them before?' I asked her.

'Some of them were hidden by the back of the sofa.'

The round face of a small girl with pigtails, arms and legs flying in the air, also Arabic writing, a tree with roots longer than its branches, bent arrows, cryptic signs and more Arabic writing.

At the local bar my neighbor found me holding a tin of paint. Bringing his glass, he came over to enquire about the tin. When I told him the story, he said that he too had had to stick posters on the walls of his house.

'A great idea' I said, 'but the drawings at my place you can't stick posters over.'

That evening we got down to painting the wall. The blue liquid sank deep down into the etched crevices. When I'd finished, I took a look at my job from a distance, then handed Yael the tin and brush.

'What do you think?'

'Not too bad,' she answered uncertainly.

'Wait till it dries.'

Next morning, when the scrawls looked clearer and more conspicuous, Yael said:

'I don't know, but it seems to me that the posters would be better and cheaper.'

'We'll give it another coat of paint,' I said firmly.

Poster alongside poster.

"Come to Israel, Land of Dreams. "

"Enlist in the Israeli Defence Army."

"Want to be happier? Drink brandy."

'Eva!' I shouted as I was taking off my trousers in the bedroom.

Her voice was annoyed: 'My name's Yael.'

'Yael, come here. They're in the bedroom too aeroplanes and rockets this time.'

She came running.

'Where?'

I pointed at the wall where there were war planes, suns, scribbles and rubble.

Throwing down her arms, she uttered helplessly: The hooligan!'

That night I dreamed that our bedroom had turned into a battlefield. I was hiding behind a curtain peeping in horror at paper aeroplanes that launched fireballs at the bed and floor.

Although Yael was not with me, her screaming filled me

with terror.

Suddenly one of the aeroplanes came towards me. It swooped down on the curtain, its paper tail shaking violently. As the curtain went up in flames, I jumped between the holes and the debris of my bed.

I found my wife sprawled on the floor. Behind me a plane roared. I had no time to save Yael. I ran out of the room as fast as I could and entered a long dark passageway filled with the clamor of aeroplanes. I ran till I was exhausted. I propped myself against the walls, my fingers sinking deep into the crevices etched with scribbled writing.

At last a faint glow of light showed from a distant peephole. I limped towards it, but before I reached it I saw something that froze the blood in my veins.

I don't know why I should have been so frightened, for it was merely a young boy regarding me with a spiteful, enigmatic smile.

He was coming down slowly. He went on coming down. I happened to glance at his hands and I saw that he held between his fingers the strings of paper aeroplanes.

I let out a scream that resounded through the passageway as I turned and hurried back.

I could feel him running after me. I fell, got up, ran on, stumbling.

He was right behind me. I could hear his breathing. I lost consciousness.

'You're raving!'

'No, Yael, I'm not. Can't you hear? Listen, can't you hear footsteps on the stairs?'

'I don't hear anything.'

'They're coming closer, Yael. They're coming closer.'

Since that time I have started to hear the sound of footsteps on the stairs: going up the stairs, coming down, coming closer.

Then there was the rustling sound of paper aeroplanes

passing through the bedroom. But the worst thing was the grating sound of a pencil scribbling pictures and writing on the walls. I could hear it everywhere and at all times in the house. Even Yael heard it.

As we had no way to plug our ears, we learned to shout when we talked in order to drown out that noise of scraping, and we started to read poetry at the tops of our voices and to bury our heads under the pillows and coverlet. The scraping still went on. Then, at night, we'd plug our ears with cotton wool.

'Dan, let's get out of the house.'

'Hush - don't talk so loud!'

'Let's get out of the house, Dan.'

'But this is disloyalty! Remember Ben Immotz.<sup>(2)</sup> I'll lose my job - or even worse.'

But I was going to lose my job anyway, for one day the section head came and put his arm on my shoulder and said:

'Dan, why don't you try to take some leave?'

'What shall I do with leave?'

'It's obvious you're in need of some. Your work isn't what it used to be. Your drawings, once so sensitive, have now become... how shall I put it? They've become more like children's scrawls. I'd like to advise you to see a doctor.'

'But I'm not ill.'

'You're pale. You've got circles under your eyes and your hands tremble. Your colleagues say that from time to time you're jumping up and rushing to the curtains to part them and peep through. What more reason do you need for seeing a doctor?'

'Dan Ben Schmitt, your duty as a citizen of the Israeli state is to take good care of yourself. We cannot afford to a single good citizen before the war.'

I took some leave. Maybe they think I'm crazy? Hearing sounds that don't exist?



But Yael hears them too. Of course I didn't tell them that. I left, swallowing my pride.

Anyway, I did what every loyal Israeli should do: I went with Yael to the doctor.

At successive sessions we recounted our reminiscences of childhood back there in Cologne, our petty problems, our dreams and nightmares.

He gave me sedatives, saying that it was the usual difficulty of getting acclimatized in new surroundings. He assured us that it was not unusual for strange sounds to be heard in old houses, that even he had sometimes heard them in his own house.

The last time we came out of his clinic, Eva said:

'Karl, let's walk a bit. I don't want to go back to that house now.'

We went into a small garden where I wandered away on my own.

'Karl, where did you go?'

I returned to her.

'I was looking for a flower. Sorry, darling, I didn't find one. Do you remember the first time I saw you?'

'Never mind, it's enough that you thought of it. Yes, it was a white daisy. And do you remember the park keeper? O, Karl! How dare you pick a flower, sir!'

Eva gave an embarrassed laugh, a laugh I had not heard for a long time.

'And I said: "Look, man - doesn't my beloved Eva deserve a tiny little daisy?"'

Eva leaned against me.

'He looked seriously at you and said: "She deserves a whole bunch of flowers!"'

Eva laughed again and I hugged her close to me.

'I like to see you laugh.'

'But I really was frightened - I mean that day.'

We strolled about a while in silence, then Eva said: 'I expect Frau Schneider is back from the market by now.'

'Oh, Eva, what made you think of her?'

'That was the time we came back from the market. I wish now I had written to her as I promised. I remember saying goodbye to her. She was standing on the doorstep surrounded by Trudy and Max.'

I smiled at the mention of Max - his mischievous face and his long blond hair that was always falling over his eyes.

'She was clasping our dog Vicky to her, and the last thing she said was, "Don't worry, I shall always water the plants and look after Vicky." Do you see, Karl? She said it as though we were going to go back one day.'

I grabbed her by the arm and said forcefully:

'We must not think that way. You did well not to write to her. We are starting anew.'

'But I can't, Karl. I didn't tell you before, but I miss them all very much: Trudy, Max, Gustav, the butcher, the milkman, the postman, Vicky, even my mother's grave, the pavements, the house we could call home with its yellow wallpaper.'

'Stop it!'

'That was our home. Why can't we go back?'

I slapped her hard.

'Yael, shut up! Let's go home.'

'That house!' she uttered with hate in her voice.

The door opened onto the dark passageway. We walked apprehensively. The house was unusually quiet.

We waited, but this time the silence was heavy. We exchanged glances and smiled nervously.

Then Yael went to the kitchen to prepare supper, while I sat in the lounge reading a book in silence; I no longer felt any need to read out loud, for everything around me was quiet.

I heard Yael humming to herself in a hesitant voice. The sound grew nearer, then she entered the room carrying slices of

cold meat, some pieces of bread and two glasses of wine.

We sat opposite each other. For the first time I felt at ease, as though I'd put down a weight I had been carrying.

Yael exclaimed, laughing: 'Sorry for what I did on the way. It was stupid of me.'

'It doesn't matter. What did the doctor call it? - the difficulty of acclimatizing to new surroundings.'

'I promise to make every effort. I don't hear anything now.'

'Neither do I.'

'I'm happy, Karl.'

'Dan!'

'How silly of me! I'm sorry, Dan!'

We raised our glasses.

'Here's to us!'

But Yael's hand froze halfway. She was looking behind my back in terror.

'Karl, I see...'

The glass dropped from her hand.

I looked round quickly.

From that moment on we no longer heard anything.

We began instead to see!

*Buthayna Al-Nassiri*

1. Merkaz Hakleta is the reception centre where new immigrants to Israel learn Hebrew and something about the history and geography of Palestine.
2. Dan Ben Immotz: a leftist dramatist who made a stir in Israeli society some years ago when he set off to look for the Palestinian who had previously owned his house. On finding him, he gave him back the key saying that throughout his stay he had not once felt that the house really belonged to him. He also said: 'Every Jew should depart from the land, leaving Golda (Meir) to stay behind and put out the last candle.'

## BOOKS FOR SALE

*Translated by Faisal Muhammad*

My dear friend,

I am writing to you after coming back from the Serai Market which specializes in old books. Do you still remember it? I displayed my books on the sidewalk next to the *kubbah* vendor. I was trying to sell the last remaining books of my library: *Les Chemins de la Liberté*, *L'Etre et le Néant* by Sartre, and dozens of my most prized books in philosophy, poetry, literature, criticism and culture. I was trying to sell these books in order to return home with some bread.

I am reminding you of *Les Chemins de la Liberté* and the Serai Market, because it was there where we first met. You were looking at a used copy with scrutinizing eyes. You were haggling with the vendor over the price, now protesting, now throwing the book back on the sidewalk by other valuable books. You picked up the book again with shaky fingers, turned the pages, fondled the book as though caressing the body of your beloved woman. Then the cycle of haggling, anger and protest started again.

When, in a fit of frustration, you tossed the book for the last time, I picked it up. Our eyes met, and I could see tears in yours. Those tears, induced by deep anger, you tried in vain to suppress. Exasperated, you walked away.

I paid the price which you could not afford and then

followed you. Every time I was about to catch up with you, you, apparently on purpose, walked faster, sometimes even trotted. Finally, having lost my breath, I caught up with you. I tapped you on the shoulder. With fiery eyes and clinched fists, you turned towards me. Only when I placed the book between your hands did the fists open flat.

Only then did your face light up. Your pace slowed down to match mine, as we walked to the nearest café. While we sipped tea, you told me that you had suspected me to be one of those security agents stationed in the market to watch for shoppers interested in books on freedom, in secret leaflets and banned books which had been smuggled from Syria and Lebanon. Once found out, such customers were arrested and taken, together with their banned materials, to the nearest security station.

I gave you my address and told you that you could help yourself to any book in my library. The collection, although it did not include banned materials, might be of interest to you. I wondered whether anyone could differentiate between what was allowed and what was banned after such frequent changes of political regimes and policies, so much so that the legal and the illegal became mingled together.

You said that you, too, had "some books." But when I asked about the titles, you hesitated, smiled and kept silent.

As you were taking the last sip of tea from your cup, you read my address aloud once, twice, and then one last time in a kind of whisper. I found this rather strange. I asked why. You said it was your way of committing addresses to memory. I told you that you could keep the slip on which I wrote my address. Your hand crumpling up the slip, a mysterious smile occupying the side of your mouth, you replied that you preferred not to keep notes with written addresses. I did not understand. I wanted to ask for an explanation, but you had already left. Then I remembered that I did not ask for your address. But, I thought, even if I did not ask, you were supposed to give me your

address, since I had given you mine. Your lack of courtesy irritated me—until I found out later.

It was sometime between a scorching summer noonday, when the soul yearns for shade at home and for relaxation after a heavy meal (now a thing of the past), and late afternoon, when the soul craves for a balmy breeze on a cliff by the river.

It was quite sometime since we had first met. I almost forgot you. I was upset that you did not return the book. You had promised to return it. I had not told you that I had another copy in my library, lest you should feel embarrassed. I had been afraid you would think that buying the book for you was a sort of handout out of benevolence, or that you would reject the book out of pride. Such pride was extreme, even rude, I dare say.

Indirectly encouraging you not to return the book, I added that many had "borrowed" books and never returned them, and that losing another book would not have mattered to me that much.

"But it does matter to me," you retorted in a near-screaming, firm, definitive voice. Trying to give the book back to me, you added, "I am not one of those." I wanted to tell you that I had not meant—that my purpose had only been to make the matter easy for you. But I realized what kind of an embarrassing situation I had put myself in, or, more appropriately, you had put me in as a result of your exaggerated pride.

It had hurt me to find myself, assumably the benevolent party, on the defensive, made to apologize and offer excuses. I had been about to extend my hand and take the book. Then the words slipped out of my mouth, "Sorry, I did not mean." You had waited for these words, as though you expected them, your hand, holding the book, returned to your side.

Again, it infuriated me that I had acted in such an unexpected fashion. I almost screamed, "Give me back my book, and go to hell!" But you had already gone.

You did not come back. You did not return the book as you had promised. Should I say I was enraged? No! Probably, (and I am acknowledging it to you only now) I felt happy. Probably I harbored a desire for revenge, for exposing your image, which you had insisted on projecting as a proud one. Probably I said vengefully, and remembering your definitive voice, "I am not one of them; *you* are."

It was sometime between a merciless noonday and an expected comfortable late afternoon, a genuine one, too. There was a knock at the door, then another. Sluggishly, I got up and opened the door. Your face looked thinner, and your head had been shaved, though fine hair was starting to grow again.

I embraced you and showed you in, saying, "You really have a peculiar way of memorizing addresses." Irritated, you retorted, "And in remembering them, too." Due to your oversensitivity, which was, I dare say, even pathological, you imagined that my remark was meant to be derisive. You assumed I resented your disappearance for such a long time, especially since I could not help looking at your empty hands. "There is no time for reproof, anyway," you said. Extending your hand towards your pocket, you added, "I came to settle an old account between us. Your book has been lost, stolen if you will. How much did you pay for it?"

Once again, you tried to deal with me arrogantly. I was about to scream in your face, "*Enough!*" and show you the door. But, instead, I laughed, again indignantly, and took you to my library. I showed you *Les Chemins de la Liberté*, *L'Etre et le Néant*, *La Nausée*, *La Putain Respectueuse*, *Les Mains Sales* and other works by Sartre.

You felt the books and the shelves like a passionate lover. Your eyes wide and baffled, you turned to me, "But... why?" and you paused. You wanted to ask, "Why did you buy the book, since you already had a copy of it?" You did not finish your question. To both of us, the situation seemed strange and funny. Since you understood now, you even opened your

arms, giving up your pride and reserve for the first time, and we embraced. After that encounter we became friends.

You told me how you had lost *Les Chemins de la Liberté* when the police raided your home. It did not help that the author was an existentialist. All your attempts to explain that to the policemen were in vain. As far as the policemen were concerned, Sartre's existentialism would not change anything, since there was the word '*Liberté*' on the book. And since there were other banned books which talk about freedom, smuggled Marxist books, secret leaflets, etc., you were, again, arrested and put in jail. I realized that you were mentioning all these details so that I would forgive your disappearance.

Your eyes wandered over the books, "A truly bourgeois library," you exclaimed half-jokingly. You started to joke, at last. I said I preferred having a bourgeois library right in the open to having an underground "revolutionary" one—to use your words—which I would lose every now and then and end up in jail on its account.

You curled your lips to show you were not convinced. You separated your lips. "Now he is going to start a revolutionary speech." Patiently, I started to prepare myself for this. "He is going to mince his revolutionary onion in my face. If only he would mince it on his own shaved head. This might accelerate the growth of his hair."

"Maybe you are right," you said. I thanked God. You told me how you gave up all your books because you did not want to add to the police collection, or rather collections. The police had the largest revolutionary library, or perhaps more accurately the largest archives on the revolutionary movement.

"Thanks to your vigilance," it almost slipped out of my mouth. But I guarded against a fit of your anger and pride.

Again you browsed among the books, holding them with a passion bordering on infatuation. As you did that, you kept repeating, "In the beginning was the Word." I completed the quotation from the Bible. You objected:



"No! It was revolution."

"You materialists used to believe that the Word can change the world; you still do?"

When I drew your attention to this contradiction, you, as though a recording, started to talk about the dialectic relationship between the "superstructure" and the "infrastructure." I was so filled, even stuffed, with your crammed words, that I was, pardon me, about to defecate. There was no way to excuse myself and check your effusion. "A big double meal: Iraqi and revolutionary, all at once; that was too much. I remember that now. I laugh and cry. Where are those days?" Probably I did something that betrayed both my "spiritual" and "material" distress, "super/up there" and "infra/down here," to interpret things using your own revered terminology. You did not even realize what caused my distress.

As though you caught me red-handed, you asked, "Why do you buy books then? Why do you read in the first place?"

"For my spiritual pleasure, for knowledge," I replied.

"What is the importance of knowledge if it does not lead to change?" You quoted Marx, "In the past, the role of philosophy was to interpret the world; now its role is to change it." You picked Sartre's *Les Intellectuels et La Revolution*, and I picked up *Les Mains Sales*.

"It is the worst thing he wrote," you said, turning your lips with contempt.

"But it is a book, a word, to use your term, another word."

"Yes, but there are different kinds of words. One kind advocates change; another is against change."

"Change?" I asked in doubt, "but in what direction?"

"Change for the people," you asserted firmly.

I was not convinced, "Change people, change people, two big words. How many trifles were hidden behind them." I referred you once more to *Les Mains Sales*.

The argument took us to *Les Chemins de la Liberté*. You

said that you were not impressed by Matieu's character.

Although you did not tell me that, I realized that you preferred André the communist. You compared me to Matieu, while you compared yourself to André. You turned again to the discussion on the intellectual and his responsibility. Probably you, excuse me, half-bald, wanted to inform on me, because I, the intellectual, who had a big library, did not fulfill my obligation to the word, to the people. To you, the whole thing was all too obvious: there is only one way to freedom. Do you still believe so? To me there has always been more than one concept of and more than one way to freedom. I was hesitant over these concepts and ways; I still am. Perhaps I wanted to add that it was better if there were petty bourgeois intellectuals, like me, who at least kept books for people like you, and probably protected them from the likes of you.

We parted and met later, and then met more times. We were brought together by such infrequent, extraordinary encounters. Then one winter evening, you came in, shaky. You said you were leaving. Again? But I remembered you had said that you would never do it again, even if you had to stay and make some concessions. You had suffered enough in self-exile.

"Things are different this time. They are not going to spare any one. They are not going to be satisfied with 'some concessions'. They want our heads."

"You are running away with your dear souls?" I wondered, in a rather sarcastic tone.

"We will reorganize our ranks," you replied, overcome by grief and probably by embarrassment. Trying to hide your sense of defeat, you suggested that I do the same.

"You reorganize your ranks; in the meantime, I will 'reorganize' my book collection," I said while I got up and wiped the dust off *Chemins de la Liberté*. "I am a man of the word. I would rather stick to my books, to my collection. Where can I possibly take them? 'They' know that; so they might spare me," I added as I was putting *Chemins de la Liberté* back on the

shelf.

"They will not spare anyone; you will see."

I made no reply. I preferred to continue dusting the bookshelves.

"You will see where you will end up because of your books," you kept repeating.

"Not to self-exile, anyway," I said. I thought I wanted to scream and ask you not to run away. I did not embrace you, probably as an admonishment or out of frustration.

I never imagined, however, that, among the many ways to freedom, one of them would lead to the *kubbah* vendor at the end of the Serai Market, where old and used books are sold. Having failed to sell the remaining books of my library on the sidewalk—who would buy books these days, anyway; who would read?—I turned to the *kubbah* vendor. I begged him to exchange his *kubbah* for my books, "Just five pies *Hajj*. May God keep erect the monument to which you made the pilgrimage. *Hajj*, this is Sartre; this is Camus; this is..."

"*Yawash!* Sartre! Whose wife is this, may God safeguard her honour? But I do not read; you know that."

"You can still use them to wrap the *kubbah*," I continued begging. Finally the *Hajj* was convinced. He took my books. From *Les Chemins de la Liberté*, he tore some pages off. I felt as though he were tearing my insides. Animal fat was penetrating the words "*Les Chemins de la Liberté*"; thus "being" and "nothingness" became equal.

I wanted to scream; but I laughed instead. Then I started to write...

*Ibrahim Al-Hariri*

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